TaraElla's Political Theory of Everything:

Why Everything points to the need for a New Moderate-Libertarian Politics

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Preface

This book consists of articles written in 2023-26, on my personal observations of the Western political landscape of this era. Together, I think they make a clear case for the need for a new moderate-libertarian politics. This politics would be inherently moderate i.e. rejecting both the ideological far-left and far-right alike, and also libertarian-gradualist, i.e. with a clear goal of moving towards more freedom over time. The latter point is important, because with both the far-left and the far-right trying to move in a clearly authoritarian-populist direction, 'procedural centrists' whose idea of moderation is just to stand between the two poles might end up in an authoritarian-middle position, inspired by both the populist left and the populist right, by default. In contrast, this book attempts to demonstrate how and why moderation and freedom are inherently linked, thus rejecting the authoritarian-middle position, and embracing the moderate-libertarian position.

The articles are arranged by theme, and within each theme, in an order that I think makes the most sense in terms of presentation of the arguments. They are

therefore not chronologically arranged. I apologize in advance for the slight confusion this might cause for the reader.

I. The Basic Case for a Moderate-Libertarian Politics

Why Moderates are Necessary for Free Speech

In the past decade, free speech has been attacked and eroded by forces from both the left and the right, to an extent not seen since at least World War II. I think an important question we need to ask is, why is it happening now? Why did free speech norms that have stood the test of time suddenly begin to crumble at this moment? What is it about our current political moment that has allowed this to happen?

I think the answer lies in extremism, and the tribalism, self-righteousness, lack of genuine openness, and lack of commitment to the objective truth that comes with embracing an extreme politics. It is an objective fact that both the left and the right have gotten more extreme in the past decade. Ideas previously considered taboo have been increasingly mainstreamed from both directions: divisive oppressor vs. oppressed identity politics, pseudo-Freudian and existentialist philosophical theories, and the critical anarchist deconstructionist worldview from the left; 'replacement theory' inspired ultra-nationalism, new pro-authoritarian political ideologies (like Neoreaction and NatCon), and literally

regressive culture war posturing from the right. What all these ideologies have in common is that they have no use for studying the objective truth as it is, or learning from the viewpoints of other people. They are already certain of their own correctness and righteousness, and the only thing left to do is to impose their vision on the rest of society, by force or other illiberal means if necessary. Such ideologies have no use for free speech. While there are indeed individual cases of extremists who nevertheless respect free speech, it is only logical that extreme political movements, as a whole, don't respect free speech very much.

On the other hand, moderates have a consistent interest in defending free speech. This is because moderates don't have a pre-established commitment to an extreme ideology. This makes it more possible to be truly open to the different viewpoints that exist out there. After all, it is only natural that, when coming to a topic without preconceived commitments, one would want to gather as much evidence as possible, in order to arrive at a more accurate understanding of the objective truth. Moreover, given the lack of commitment to an overarching view of how things must be, moderates don't always agree with the ideas of any one tribe. I mean, moderates don't even always agree with each other on every topic! The fact that moderates don't ever

feel comfortable to join a tribe, and that disagreements are a normal part of life for moderates, also mean that they would have more incentive to embrace free speech. This is because free speech is both a mechanism for resolving our differences, and also a way to agree to disagree peacefully when we must.

Herein lies an important paradox: free speech allows people to reject moderation. Indeed, it allows people to be extremists, and to promote their extremist ideas. A moderatism that censors ideas it considers to be extreme would no longer be upholding free speech, by definition. (It would probably also not be truly moderate anymore.) On the other hand, the rise of extremism is harmful for free speech, and could eventually kill it off altogether. Putting it another way, free speech must allow people to not be moderates, but if too few committed and outspoken moderates remain, free speech itself might cease to exist. In this way, some doomers might even say it is inevitable that free speech eventually digs its own grave.

Is there a way we can resolve this paradox, so that free speech doesn't end up digging its own grave? I guess we can both uphold free speech, and also promote the virtues of political moderation within the bounds of respect for free speech. There is no contradiction in

these things, as long as we are using the free market of ideas to promote moderation, rather than using censorship to force people to be moderate. Indeed, I believe one of the biggest mistakes of the 2010s free speech movement was a lack of discussion about the virtues of the kind of political moderation which would naturally support a culture of free speech. In the 2010s, free speech activists often talked about things like respecting the 'marketplace of ideas' when we opposed de-platforming and cancel culture, but we didn't talk enough about why we should respect the marketplace of ideas. This, in turn, allowed bad faith actors to pretend to be one of us, in order to defend the speech of people they agreed with, only to later turn around to support anti-free speech actions from their own tribe, thus discrediting the whole movement, and setting the cause of free speech back even further.

There are many reasons why I support free speech. But an important reason is because I am a moderate, and I believe it is very important to emphasize this. Free speech goes with a moderate politics like a horse and a cart. It allows us to reject tribalism and embrace independent thinking, listen to different perspectives, arrive at a more accurate understanding of the objective truth, try to find common ground and agree where we can, and peacefully disagree where we must. These are

all attractive features for the political moderate. This is why I believe defending free speech is the natural position of the moderate, and promoting moderate politics is key to ensuring the continued survival of free speech.

Why Both the Far-Left and the New Right are Very Similar

Since the 2010s, left-wing cancel culture has been a major frustration in many contexts. Left-wing de-platforming started as a way to contain 'hateful' opinions, but it soon became clear that it was a way to contain any opinions that might be inconvenient for the postmodern-critical left and its revolutionary agenda. Even people with sincerely held opinions, who only wanted to make the social justice movement do better, or point out its blind spots, were de-platformed without much consideration. For example, during BLM 2020, even saying that the more violent protests were helping Trump was immediately met with cries of 'tone policing', and shut down promptly. At that point it was clear that de-platforming was not about 'hateful' speech anymore, but rather, a tool of the revolution, used to block out any and all doubters of the revolutionary agenda.

In reaction to the widespread frustration caused by left-wing cancel culture, some people turned to the right, who were pretending to care about free speech at that point. But soon after, it became clear that the right was no better on free speech. By 2022, the agenda of book

bans, drag bans, and the war on supposedly ‘woke corporations’ like Disney was in full swing. In 2023, this escalated to things like the Bud Light boycott, and the Target Pride Collection boycott, with the full backing of right-wing influencers and elected politicians alike. Of course, none of that even came close to the kind of disrespect towards free speech that the Trump administration has been engaging in ever since its return to power in 2025. Just like the postmodern-critical left, the New Right has a clear sense of an agenda, as outlined by speakers in their conferences like NatCon and CPAC, as well as documents like the infamous ‘Project 2025’, and it will do anything in its power to shut down those who are in its way, in the implementation of said agenda.

Some people, especially those in the newly popular ‘decadeology’ and ‘generationology’ communities, see the 2010s and the 2020s as separate entities, the former supposedly more ‘woke’, and the latter supposedly more ‘conservative’, because of Trump winning the popular vote for the first time in 2024, the supposed ‘right turn’ of Gen Z men, and the presence of Andrew Tate and the manosphere. However, the twin phenomenon of the postmodern-critical left and the ‘New Right’ culture warriors have actually existed in parallel to each other throughout this whole period, mirroring each other as

they both got more and more authoritarian, and less and less respectful of free speech, over time. (The Red Pill movie was released in 2016, and Unite the Right in Charlottesville happened in 2017. Meanwhile, the last time I was attacked for using 'woke' the 'wrong' way was in April 2026, so don't tell me the 'woke left' doesn't exist anymore.) It turns out that believing your side is morally correct or otherwise righteous 100% of the time, and seeing your mission as one of waging war on the 'opposite' side, inevitably leads to authoritarianism, no matter if you start out on the left or the right. When you believe that your side, and your side alone, knows the 'truth', and everyone else is either a useful idiot of the enemy (which is honestly how both sides feel about moderates and centrists like myself) or downright evil, there is not going to be much room for allowing for disagreement and debate.

I think the most important lesson of the past decade is that being pro-freedom and being somewhat moderate are more closely correlated than most people used to think. For example, some political tests have authoritarian-libertarian as a separate axis to the left-right axis, meaning that, at least in the world of that test, one could be far-left or far-right and still be libertarian. Meanwhile, in the real world, I have yet to meet anyone who is far-left or far-right, and yet still

respects everyone's freedom. The far-left likes to say things like 'liberals go to the gulags too' and are trying to rehabilitate violently illiberal revolutionaries all the time, and the far-right is never far from trying to impose their religious fundamentalism on people's medical freedom. The truth is, when you believe in a strident way that your way is the only correct way, and more importantly, you also believe that the way society currently is fundamentally represents evil, and fundamentally needs changing, but most people don't agree with the kind of change you want to impose, it's very difficult to remain respectful of other people's freedom. On the other hand, if you are a moderate, you are almost by definition open to listening to views on all sides, and consider all points of view without too much a-priori ideological judgement. This means that you are much more likely to respect others' free speech and freedom of conscience. As I've said for a long time, freedom doesn't exist in a vacuum. That the political polarization of the past 1-2 decades has led to severe erosion in free speech is simply predictable cause and effect.

I previously said that free speech depends on the existence of moderates. I not only still stand by this, I think it should be taken further: freedom itself depends on the existence of moderates in abundance, in any

given society. It is moderates that have the most reason to support and respect freedom. If society becomes polarized by extremist ideologies in both directions, neither side would have much incentive to support freedom, and freedom would naturally be eroded, and eventually wither away completely. This, I'm afraid, is what is already beginning to happen in the West in the 2020s. Making the case for moderatism is part and partial of making the case for freedom, and we must urgently make this case, convincingly and forcefully, if we are to reverse our current slide into authoritarianism.

Reconciling Libertarianism and Reformism

I am going to talk about my project to reconcile libertarianism and reformism.

On one hand, I have been sympathetic to libertarian thinking for more than 20 years, even though I have to acknowledge that libertarian immediatism is not realistic at all, and the dominance of immediatists have seriously harmed the popularity of libertarianism. I first became interested in libertarianism during the 2003 Iraq War, when the right was trying to silence anti-war and anti-Bush speech, including the infamous cancellation of the Dixie Chicks. Given that we live in a moment where the postmodern left practices cancel culture regularly, and the populist right thrives on banning books, drag queens, abortion and even masks, it is clear that society needs a big dose of libertarianism ASAP. We need to make libertarianism credible and popular again for this to happen.

On the other hand, over my observation and involvement in the Western political landscape of the past 21 years, I have gradually come to develop an

appreciation of reformism. I believe the heart and soul of reformism is basically the classical liberal belief that society and people's lives can be made better via empiricism and rationality, tempered by the Burkean conservative view that any change should be based on practical needs rather than abstract ideas, and should be gradualist and consistent with a given society's traditions rather than revolutionary and abrupt. Note that genuine Burkean conservative philosophy, developed in response to the events of the French Revolution, is very different from what so-called conservative political parties represent today. I have stated this point many times in the past, but it bears repeating, because this is very important to understand. Anyway, over the years I have come to the firm conclusion that only a reformist politics can provided sustainable progress for society, by avoiding both misguided radicalism and reactionary backlash.

The first problem we have here is that most libertarian thinking that has been developed over the past few decades, especially the so-called libertarianism of the 2010s, is fundamentally faulty on some level, which makes it support the opposite of liberty some point down the line. In the 1980s-90s the beltway libertarians and their obsession with cutting government dominated. These people ended up doing nothing to

advance individual liberty per se, and some even sided with the Bush administration's 2003 Iraq War, which was a total sellout of libertarian values. On the other side were the paleolibertarians, a faction that were steadfast in their anti-war beliefs but sided with far-right paleoconservatives on most other issues. This paleolibertarianism was the precursor to what became known as the 'libertarian to alt-right' pipeline in the 2010s, and was arguably the precursor to neoreaction thinking, which is clearly not libertarian at all. Later on, there was 'anarcho-capitalism', which is a very extreme form of libertarianism that opposes government in all its forms, and fantasizes about things like private police and fire departments. I think it is this kind of extremism that eventually gave rise to the conspiracy thinking that ultimately discredited libertarianism by around 2020.

The second problem we have is that most of the libertarian thinking that has been developed over the past few decades is simply incompatible with reformism. They all want government gone, and right now. This, I think, is the reason for both the unprincipledness and the tendency towards extremism. Therefore, to make libertarianism credible again, it needs to be realigned towards the reformist philosophy. And it's not as difficult as some might think. As I said before, reformism is basically liberal rationality plus conservative

cautiousness and gradualism. Both the classical liberal emphasis of rationality, and the conservative emphasis that reform should be based on practical needs rather than abstract ideas, can modify libertarianism to make it more reformist and practical. This, in turn, would make it more credible, and hopefully more popular. By making libertarianism credible and popular again, we can build a strong bulwark to prevent both the illiberal left and the illiberal right from crushing individual freedom with their culture war agendas.

To reconcile libertarianism and reformism, I believe we need to further develop the philosophy of both traditions more fully. In particular, we need to separate the core strands of thinking of both traditions from what has been happening in the crazy politics of the past 10-15 years. From there, we need to identify the common ground between the two traditions, and the areas where they might be able to supplement each other. Right now, I can think of attention to the complexities of reality, respect for different opinions, and compassion as a few areas of common ground between libertarians and reformists. I'm sure there are more to discover. This will be a major focus of my work going forward.

What a Centrist Libertarian Program Looks Like in Practice

In recent years, I've come to identify as both a centrist and a libertarian. I've explained numerous times elsewhere why I identify with these labels. But still, some people seem to think it's a contradiction. And it really shouldn't be. I mean, if someone told you that they identified as being on the right and a libertarian, that would make sense to most people. Alternatively, if someone told you that they identified as a leftist and a libertarian, that would still make sense at least to people who are familiar with political philosophy. In other words, right-libertarianism is not only real but also the default mode of libertarianism in the English-speaking West, and left-libertarianism is at least a very real thing that is well understood by many politically engaged people. On the other hand, most people still seem to be unable to imagine what a centrist libertarianism looks like.

To explain centrist libertarianism, I think we should start with left-libertarianism vs right-libertarianism. The differences between left-libertarians and right-libertarians ultimately lie in what they believe to be the

biggest barriers to freedom. Traditionally, right-libertarians believe that the government is the biggest barrier to freedom, and left-libertarians believe that capitalism is the biggest barrier to freedom. In recent times, cultural views have also entered the conversation. Here, right-libertarians tend to believe that the 'woke' establishment and its institutions are the most important enemy of freedom, while left-libertarians tend to see the same with religion and traditional values. The clarity of who the 'enemy' is means that both left-libertarians and right-libertarians tend to have quite extreme, and therefore 'immediatist', policy positions, and they believe that if they were allowed to get their way, liberty would be realized almost overnight.

Centrist libertarians are different from both left-libertarians and right-libertarians in that, while we aim for the maximization of freedom like all other libertarians, we understand that the conditions that favor or disfavor freedom are multifactorial. We don't believe that the left or the right exclusively has the answers to what makes a society free. Rather, we empirically observe what conditions are conducive to freedom in practice, and what conditions are harmful to freedom in practice. The set of 'conditions for freedom' that we care about are much larger than the simplistic

views of both left-libertarians and right-libertarians. For example, polarization, echo chambers, loss of respect for science and objective truth, and an over-commitment to abstract philosophy are all harmful for freedom. Both left-libertarians and right-libertarians fail to see all this, because they are too obsessed with their own ideology. Centrist libertarianism, in contrast, is much more empirical and practical.

This also means that a centrist libertarianism is necessarily a gradualist libertarianism. When you believe that freedom is multifactorial, and that there is no simple fix that would magically take us to freedom utopia, you understand that the road to more freedom lies in trial and error, give and take, and in both promoting new forms of freedom, as well as safeguarding existing forms of freedom. Like other centrists, we understand that making good, sustainable policy lies in balance and compromise, and aiming for overnight perfection is just a recipe for disaster. This is in contrast to both left-libertarians and right-libertarians, who mostly agree with the broader left and the broader right respectively as to who is the 'enemy', and find almost no room for agreement with the other side. This is what leads to many right-libertarians embracing policy positions very similar to that of the Republican Freedom Caucus, and many left-libertarians embracing wokeness

to some extent, even though that ideology is clearly anti-free speech and individual liberty. Of course, we centrists know that both the hard-left and the hard-right are actually not that good for freedom in practice. As centrists, we are able to see the pitfalls inherent in both left-wing and right-wing politics, and their anti-freedom implications.

Centrist libertarianism also differs from pure 'centrism' in an important way. Unlike centrists who are not libertarians, we still insist on prioritizing our general goal of promoting freedom when it comes to what we are willing to support, and the kind of compromises that we are willing to make. For example, a centrist libertarian will not agree to a platform that results in clearly less freedom than the status quo, no matter what benefits its supporters claim it will bring. Also, in hammering out compromises, we will always bring the case for freedom to the table, and argue that a policy of agreeing to disagree and respecting each other's freedom will often be the best form of compromise. Finally, our commitment to freedom means that we will not fall for 'populist' policy platforms that combine social and economic authoritarianism, even if they do superficially combine policies from the left and the right. We want to take the best parts from both sides, not the worst parts.

II. The Case Against the Right-Libertarian Alliance

The Libertarian Movement of my youth Didn't Align with the Right

In recent years, Western politics has seemingly become a brain-dead shouting match between two very unappealing teams. Like so-called woke vs anti-woke (which eventually became hijacked by MAGA and New Right types), or more broadly speaking, 'anyone who disagree with me is a fascist' vs 'own the libs no matter what'. And it seems that some people actively expect that, if you disagree with one team, you would at least be sympathetic to the other. Like how every time I write something about the faults of the woke left, some people start expecting me to be sympathetic to the reactionary New Right, or even Trump himself. Like, if you're familiar with my thinking, you know that's not happening. I'm never going to be open to any kind of collaboration with MAGA or the New Right more generally, period.

Anyway, the bigger question here should be, why does it seem like everyone has somehow forgotten that there are indeed better options than the 'woke left' and the 'populist right'? Like mainstream 2000s libertarianism, rooted in opposition to the Iraq War, the increasingly

intrusive surveillance state justified on the 'War on Terror', and the intrusion of religious authoritarianism into government since Bush-43's 2004 re-election campaign. In many ways, 2025 is literally a rerun of 2005: Trump's expansionist gestures towards Canada, Denmark and Panama is basically the Bush-Cheney doctrine on steroids, and his bullying of Ukraine and Zelenskyy is just like Bush's 'you're either with us or against us' attitude. Reactionary cultural values are being forced down people's throats through the excuse of 'anti-DEI', which isn't fooling anti-woke liberals like myself. The religious right is back with a vengeance, with ever more draconian abortion bans, new anti-LGBT policies invented like every month, and a movement to overturn Obergefell and 'make gay marriage illegal again' clearly gathering pace. I think it's just weird that people are not responding like it's 2005 again.

Skepticism towards ideological governance is the very root of 2000s mainstream libertarianism. After all, more ideology almost always means less freedom. Actually, let's change that 'almost always' to 'always', because I haven't really seen a case where this isn't true. What Trump, Vance, Musk et al. are doing is clearly ideological. Trump's recent speech to congress was full of ideological posturing, culture war garbage, and aggressive partisanship. Vance might pretend to be

reasonable when he's facing a general audience like during the Vice Presidential debate last year, but as soon as he gets a more right-leaning audience, like on Joe Rogan, he shows his right-wing culture warrior colors. What Musk is doing at DOGE is also clearly ideological, and frankly, undemocratic. The 2000s mainstream libertarian would have had a lot to say about all this.

Meanwhile, MAGA-aligned pseudo-libertarians are OK with all this, and they're even OK with Trump's threats of pushing his anti-DEI nonsense into the private sector, as well as his threats to defund colleges that allow what he deems to be 'illegal protests'. Even Bush didn't dare to go there with the anti-Iraq War protests of 2003. That MAGA pseudo-libertarians are OK with Trump 2.0 just shows that they clearly have no interest in freedom, and are only interested in defending their King (and 'owning the libs'), no matter what. Contrast this to the libertarians I used to know, who would have been outraged at Trump just for his tariffs, let alone the other things. This, again, is why we need to have a real battle over the heart and soul of libertarianism. Libertarianism has been rendered confused and useless in this crucial moment by the enemy within, and this needs to be fixed ASAP.

Being tricked into finding 'common ground' with the enemy, and allowing them into our movements (whether it be libertarianism, 'centrism' or 'anti-woke') was a major mistake we made during the 2010s and early 2020s, and we need to rectify this. This is why, going forward, I believe that we who truly believe in freedom should take an even harder, even more unapologetic stand against MAGA, NatCon, right-populism, or whatever else they might want to call themselves (objectively speaking, 'neoreaction' seems to be the most appropriate label for them). There is simply no possibility of common ground between people who cherish freedom, and people who clearly don't.

Why Battle for the Soul of Libertarianism

I want to talk about why it is important that we, the people who actually believe in freedom, win the battle for the soul of libertarianism. After all, I've said repeatedly that labels don't matter all that much, that political philosophy is not the way to build a coalition to fight against extremism, that most ordinary middle class people probably don't care about political philosophy, and so on. Yet, I still believe that it is very important that true believers in freedom win the battle for the soul of libertarianism over so-called paleo-libertarians who pander to paleoconservatives, to the extent of sacrificing both civil liberties and free trade, 'beltway libertarians' who have no problem with neoconservative interventionism, neoreaction-adjacent pseudo-libertarian authoritarians who discredit us all, as well as AnCap-adjacent extremists.

The reason why we must win the battle for the soul of libertarianism is because it is simply the battle to define what freedom means, at least in the Western political context. Libertarianism is the only movement in the Western political landscape that consistently says it is

for freedom first and foremost, and consistently speaks the language of freedom. If we cede the libertarian movement to people who don't actually put freedom first, or believe in freedom in a truly universal way, or else use libertarianism to justify their extreme agendas that have nothing to do with practical personal freedom, we will lose the language of freedom to people who don't actually believe in freedom, and will use it to justify its opposite. This will be a real tragedy, with serious implications across society, including implications on civil liberties, free speech and even world peace or lack thereof.

Another thing we need to recognize is that libertarianism has become the way it is because of deliberate actions by forces from certain factions of the ruling class, acting on the small movement in the form of big sums of money over various periods of history, in order to promote their broader agendas. This, in my opinion, is what has pulled libertarianism into an unjustifiably close association with the political right, to the extent that the movement is now in danger of being swallowed by right-wing populism. First, it was the 'taxation is theft' but civil liberties and wars don't matter people. Later, it was the Tea Party people. Lately, it has been people from the populist right looking for anti-establishment credentials. All these people are not true

believers in freedom, and we must not let them define the libertarian agenda going forward. I think remaining committed to a meaning of freedom that makes sense for ordinary people is the key to seeing through these schemes.

To defend libertarianism from all the aforementioned forces, I believe we need to call out those who say they are freedom but are not really for freedom in any ordinarily meaningful sense of the word. We also need to continue to think about what freedom means, and the conditions under which it is achievable or not. I think that if we have a firm sense of this, we will not get tricked by the pretenders so easily.

What Went Wrong with the Anti-Woke Movement

In recent years, a lot has been said about 20th century 'fusionism', how it has failed, and where we should go next. On the last point, in particular, is where classical liberals like myself and the 'postliberal' right strongly disagree. Fusionism, otherwise known as the 'three legged stool', was a combination of 'neoliberal' economics, 'cultural conservatism', and a hawkish foreign policy, and claimed to be a 'fusion' of classical liberalism and conservatism. In this article, I will demonstrate why fusionism, while arguably the dominant ideology of the 20th century, especially in the latter part of the century, was essentially a dishonest ideology, and our current problems are largely its product. I will also discuss the path we should take in moving beyond fusionism, and why the postliberal solution is misguided and dangerous.

What Was Fusionism?

Fusionism claimed to be a fusion of classical liberalism and conservatism. However, in reality, there was never

any need for this 'new' fusion, because the English-speaking conservative tradition and the classical liberal tradition were already highly compatible, as long as classical liberal reforms didn't take place along theoretical, abstract lines. To understand what fusionism actually was, I think we should examine, in depth, the 'three legs' of the 'stool'.

Firstly, we had the neoliberal economics, which was a clear example of libertarian reform along abstract, philosophical lines, in clear violation of the conservative tradition. It was the very type of change that a conservative should have resisted. Secondly, we had the 'cultural conservatism', which in practice pandered strongly to reactionary elements in the post-desegregation south as well as the Roe v. Wade era religious right. This meant the 'cultural conservatism' was reactionarily opposed to basically all cultural change, which is not in line with the conservative tradition either. Finally, we had the hawkish, interventionist foreign policy, which is not going to be my focus here. The only thing I want to say is that this type of foreign policy was totally alien to the American tradition before World War II, and was by definition radical. This just shows how insincere 'fusionism' was about being truly conservative.

Therefore, fusionism was basically an intellectually inconsistent set of ideas used to gather a voting coalition for the Republican Party in America, and to some extent similar parties in other Western countries. Its function was basically to hide a very radical change in economic (and foreign) policy by promoting reactionary culture wars. The supplantation of real conservatism by fusionism led to economic policies that devastated local communities across America, Britain and other Western countries, eventually providing fuel for the rise of Trumpism, Brexit and the European 'New Right'. Meanwhile, the reactionary culture wars started by fusionist politicians took on a life of their own, and have evolved into an authoritarian movement with worrying similarities to fascism. The reactionary culture wars also provoked a strong counter-reaction among the younger generations, leading to postmodern 'woke' ideology becoming mainstream, and a vicious cycle of polarization forming between the woke left and the reactionary right. I believe all this can be blamed on fusionism, which is why it should never be revived.

Classical liberals and the postliberal right agree that fusionism was bad, and must end. But while classical liberals believe in restoring the true Burkean-Lockean conservative-liberal tradition that prevailed before fusionism, the postliberal right believes in getting rid of

classical liberalism altogether, and fully embracing the reactionary culture wars that are themselves a product of fusionism. Hence, while classical liberals believe in reversing the mistake, the postliberal right believe in getting deeper into it, by embracing the most toxic part of the fusionist legacy, even if it means burying the whole Burkean-Lockean tradition, and supplanting it with foreign ideas borrowed mainly from Eastern Europe, in doing so. This would represent a change that is both very radical and very destructive, and should be strongly resisted by all liberals and conservatives alike.

The conservative-liberal solution to fixing the mistakes of fusionism is twofold: we need to reign in the neoliberal excesses of the past 40 years, and we also need to end the reactionary culture war style of politics, and replace it with a gradualist, practical reality-driven orientation to social change. The problem is, the right is no longer conservative, and we should be brave enough to say so loudly.

The Relationship Between the Classical Liberal Tradition and the Conservative Tradition

I want to expand on what I mean by 'end the reactionary culture war style of politics, and replace it

with a gradualist, practical reality-driven orientation to social change'. Last time, I said that the true conservative, in the context of the 21st century Western English-speaking society, is necessarily a classical liberal, because our societies have long been underpinned by a classical liberal consensus. However, some of you might ask, while it is not controversial that conservatives should defend existing freedoms, how should we approach the ongoing classical liberal demand to expand individual freedoms over time? After all, classical liberalism is ultimately an abstract, philosophical position to some extent, and the conservative tradition is skeptical of all abstract, philosophical cases for change. So how do we reconcile these two positions?

As the British Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli noted, society is inevitably in an ongoing process of change, and new demands for individual liberty and equal treatment under the law will inevitably be made over time. Looking at history, it is the acceptance of such demands that has strengthened our traditions, and made our society what it is today. Even the most ardent conservative would have to agree that the abolition of slavery, the extension of the vote to all adults, and the end of legally enforced racial segregation, were all proper and necessary changes,

even though they were indeed major changes to how society functioned at the time. This means that the conservative must not reject all social change by default, and must not even reject all major social change by default. If we did, we would risk making the same mistake as those who were pro-slavery and pro-segregation, for example. Furthermore, if society has up until now accepted certain demands for change, and we decide to take a reactionary, 'just say no' attitude to all social change now, this would actually represent a break with long-standing tradition, which is clearly not the conservative thing to do. Therefore, conservatives have to accept at least some social change. The question is what kind of change to accept.

One important point I made last time was that conservatism isn't opposed to all change. It is only opposed to change that is rooted in abstract ideas that are removed from practical reality, and philosophical theory that is alien to a nation's traditions. For example, when cultural systemists demand that our long-standing respect for free speech give way to a worldview where speech is seen as a tool of the privileged to maintain an oppressive status quo, rooted in postmodern critical theory, we must firmly resist. However, when change is rooted in practical need, and the solution is consistent

with the spirit of long-standing traditions, then the change should be accepted.

This principle is actually very useful in informing our practice of classical liberalism. Under the classical liberal umbrella, there are libertarian immediatists who wish to immediately transform our societies into libertarian utopias, where driver's licenses are abolished, police and fire departments are privatized, and the economic safety net is entirely withdrawn, all in the name of achieving the smallest government possible, and/or getting as close to the non-aggression principle (NAP) as possible. The conservative, though a classical liberal, would necessarily have to oppose this kind of change, not only because it is radical, but also because it is rooted in abstract philosophy rather than practical need. Such proposals for change thus ignore the complexity of both individuals and society, and puts philosophy ahead of reality. On these points, the immediatist libertarian is in fact just as guilty as the cultural systemist. History has taught us that this kind of change rarely ends well, which is why we should reject it. This is why the conservative, while being a classical liberal, cannot be a libertarian immediatist.

On the other hand, during the gay marriage debate, I often argued on the side of what is now commonly

known as the 'conservative case' for gay marriage, although I wasn't as aware of the conservative philosophical tradition back then. The demand by gay couples to access the institution of marriage was a new social development, which naturally arose from the freedom granted by a society steeped in classical liberal traditions. This development forced us to consider adjustments to social and legal norms, with people responding in a variety of ways. Some reactionary 'conservatives' would force these gay couples to go back into the closet, but I argued this would violate our long-standing norms of individual liberty and fairness, and hence gravely harm our traditional values. Others argued that we should tolerate gay couples, but not extend the institution of marriage to them. I argued that this would make marriage a discriminatory institution in the eyes of many people, especially among the younger generations, which would injure the commonly held value of marriage as a fundamental building block of society. The fact that marriage boycott movements were propping up in many places demonstrated this harm. Having looked at the issue from every angle, there really was not a truly 'no change' solution to the demand of gay marriage. Allowing gay marriage would in fact be the path most consistent with upholding our traditions, including individual liberty, compassion, equality under

the law, respect for marriage as an important institution, and so on. In other words, accepting the demand for change would be the only way to truly uphold and strengthen our long-standing traditions, while all other paths would actually lead to the injury of such traditions.

Let's compare abolishing driver's licenses and legalizing gay marriage. The case for gay marriage was rooted in practical demands, from gay couples who realized they were missing out on important rights as couples. Nobody is demanding the abolishment of driver's licenses from a practical point of view, as far as I'm aware of. Nobody needs driver's licenses to be abolished so they could live their lives in a better way. Therefore, the demand for gay marriage was rooted in practical reality, while the case for abolishing driver's licenses is purely based on philosophy. Moreover, as I demonstrated, refusing to legalize gay marriage would actually injure some of our traditions, which made the legalization of gay marriage necessary from the point of view of the preservation of these traditions. I can't see how refusing to abolish driver's licenses would injure our traditions in any way.

In summary, I think that conservative liberals should only accept change when it is clearly rooted in practical

need, and not when it is primarily rooted in abstract philosophical justifications. This means that, as conservative liberals, we shouldn't be randomly going around society looking for things we can make more 'libertarian' in theory, when there is no practical need for change in reality. On the other hand, when there is a demand for change rooted in practical need, that is when we should use our classical liberal principles to determine if the case for change is sound. As conservative liberals, we should insist that any social change needs to be in accordance with our long-standing classical liberal values. This is why we still need to be committed to classical liberal values, and we should also be used to thinking about social issues from the classical liberal perspective. (This, in turn, is what the future development of classical liberal philosophy should be aiming at.)

How to Reverse the Anti-Woke to Reactionary Pipeline

In the 2010s, a new brand of 'progressive' coded politics inspired by certain misguided theories rooted in the academic philosophies of postmodernism and critical theory, commonly called 'woke', went mainstream. What made this brand of politics different was its illiberalism, as seen in its strategies of de-platforming, cancel culture and top-down language policing. Prior to the mid-2010s, it was generally assumed that 'progressive' and 'liberal' were basically synonymous, and that 'progressives' were anti-censorship while the right was pro-censorship, at least in the English-speaking West. Hence the arrival of woke politics led to at least some cognitive dissonance for many people. Gradually, genuine (pro-freedom) liberals developed the language to argue against woke illiberalism. Thus began the 'anti-woke' movement, for better or worse.

However, something else happened along the way. Well-funded reactionary forces began entering the anti-woke discourse, and later on came to dominate it, through their well-funded media networks. While the original liberal anti-woke movement was about intellectually

criticizing wokeness and the postmodern critical theories that drove it, in order to restore freedom, these reactionaries intended to foment an anti-intellectual culture war, in order to support the election of certain authoritarian politicians, and push through their authoritarian agenda. Thus while the original anti-wokeism was pro-freedom, this imposter anti-wokeism was/is actively anti-freedom. In particular, the reactionaries seized on the widespread frustration with wokeness to promote support for authoritarian reactionaries like Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis in America, and other similar politicians like Nigel Farage in Britain, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marie Le Pen in France, the AfD party in Germany, and so on. Judging by the behavior of Trump, DeSantis and Bolsonaro in office, it is clear that this new form of reactionary politics poses a major threat to free speech and other fundamental liberties. Given that state-driven restrictions on free speech have long been justifiably seen as a bigger authoritarian threat than cultural-driven restrictions on free speech, this means that this reactionary right political movement has become an even bigger threat to freedom than wokeness itself.

So how did a movement for freedom get so successfully hijacked, and turned into its opposite? Several factors, to be honest. But most importantly, the fact that the

reactionary right has long been much more powerful and well-organized than classical liberals, libertarians and even moderate conservatives combined. The fact that they have a lot more money than us too. Once they were in the picture, it was never going to be a fair fight anymore. Just witness what the well-funded reactionaries have been able to do to the US Libertarian Party, if not the libertarian movement as a whole.

And how, exactly, do we fight back against such a powerful and uncompromising machine? To answer this question, we should first look at who, among those who have spoken out against wokeness at some point in the 2010s, has been able to resist the 'anti-woke to reactionary' pipeline. It is largely those who have been able to maintain their independence. Those who have resisted every form of tribalism. Those who have strong philosophical beliefs, and have stayed true to their values, whether the implications of such values are popular or not. Those who have stayed loyal to the cause of pursuing the objective truth, even at the expense of burning bridges within the tribe. Those who really want more freedom for all of us, rather than wanting to join a team. Those who weren't sucked into consuming 'anti-woke' media as their almost sole source of news. Those who have remained open-minded through all this, and have remained open to arguments

from various perspectives, including those who appear to disagree with their own. And so on. Which means all this is what we need to keep doing, going forward.

The problem is, those of us who actually practice all of the above often find ourselves even more isolated and more powerless as a result. Speaking for myself, I can say that my honesty has come at a cost. I can imagine why many influencers and journalists who actually depend on it for a living wouldn't be able to afford to be so honest. Hence why the more 'popular' figures of the anti-woke movement have had the highest rates of falling into the pipeline. This means that it is not enough to just maintain our own moral conscience on this matter. If we leave it as a matter solely for the moral conscience on a personal level, we would be complicit in tolerating the current unfair playing field. The reactionary authoritarians would still be winning in the real world, even if our own consciences are seemingly not tainted by 'staying above the fray'. Freedom would still suffer as a result. Which is why we need to actively try to change the situation.

The reactionary right is certainly not shy about feeling justified regarding obtaining and holding onto the necessary power to enact their authoritarian agendas, even if unfair and controversial means are to be used

towards that end. (This, in part, is why they can never be trusted with free speech.) This is manifested clearly on the issue of gerrymandering in American politics. Most Republican-led states allow almost unrestricted gerrymandering, while many Democratic-led states have some kind of independent districting mechanism. Recently, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, encouraged by Trump, has taken this openness to gerrymander for the sake of power to whole new levels. I think all this just shows that the reactionary right is all about power, even if it is to be obtained unfairly. No amount of rational debate and righteous argumentation is going to change this, because they simply don't care. I think that, going forward, this must inform our approach towards them. Make no mistake: they are doing the cultural equivalent of gerrymandering to us classical liberals, libertarians and even moderate conservatives. In both cases, it is about obtaining power over others unfairly. And we must not unilaterally disarm ourselves like the Democrats did.

As Trump famously told the world earlier this year, when 'you don't have the cards', you really don't have too many options, when you're dealing with people like himself, who operate on the basis of power over truth and fairness. Recent events in Texas have many Democrats regretting their choice to unilaterally disarm

themselves on the issue of gerrymandering, but it might just be too little too late at this point, because they simply don't have a 'mutually assured destruction' type 'card' they could feasibly pull out in time to give Trump and Abbott pause. The lesson here is that we have to be able to recognize and differentiate between those who are committed to honesty and fairness, versus those who are essentially power players. When faced with power players, we need to ensure that we have enough cards to play, period. Nothing is more important than this. It is a lesson we need to learn if we want to defend freedom itself. At the very least, we should learn not to empower the reactionary right while compromising our own independent voices and our own independent agency, like some people in the anti-woke movement (I won't name names) actually did, out of sheer blind frustration towards wokeness, and blind faith in the 'anti-woke tribe' to make things right.

As for the actual answer as to when do we classical liberals and libertarians actually 'have the cards', when dealing with the political right's powerplay? Based on the empirical evidence of the past two decades, it seems it is whenever the right is relatively weak, either politically or culturally. During the Obama era, the right was both out of power (at least in America) and internally divided (having finally come to their senses

that the 'War on Terror' was actually a bad thing), and they allowed plenty of libertarian voices and influences in their circles. Ron Paul became a respected voice, and both the Bush-era religious right and the up-and-coming populist culture warriorism were relatively muted. Similarly, during the first Trump administration, although the right was in power politically, their cultural position was still weak, as they were still reeling from the aftereffects of the Millennials' rejection of Bush-era politics, as well as their recent defeat on gay marriage. The result was that they continued to uphold their own freedoms above all else, and briefly tried to make common ground with classical liberals and libertarians on the free speech threat coming from the woke left. On the other hand, in periods where the right was/is strong politically, like the middle of the Bush-43/War on Terror era, or right now, or where the right was at least strong culturally, like during the post-COVID era, they often have no problem with trampling on the freedom of others, and silencing those who disagree with them one way or another. Therefore, it is clear that classical liberals and libertarians 'have the cards' against the right when the right is weak culturally and/or politically.

When the right is weak (relatively speaking), they would be forced to align with us, if only to protect their own freedoms out of defensiveness. On the other hand,

when the right is strong, they would be in a position to be dismissive of guarantees of freedom, and they would also be more able to hijack our causes and drown out our voices, like they have been doing these past few years. This is what I mean by us 'having the cards' or not. Therefore classical liberals and libertarians have good reason to fear the right (at least in its current form) getting too strong, to put it mildly. This is especially true given the inherently unequal relationship between the reactionary right and classical liberals, backed by established power networks, media infrastructure and deep pockets alike, and given the right's long-standing entanglement with and effect on large parts of the classical liberal and libertarian landscape. (I'm actually going to go further and argue that this actually applies to moderate conservatives too, given that they are just as uncomfortable about the Trumpian moment we find ourselves in, while they are clearly unable to defeat or even weaken MAGA or right-wing populism in general.) It is true that during times when the right is weaker, we might have a stronger left to deal with, and we need to be prepared to counter leftist overreach like wokeness with sound arguments of our own. But at least this is an argument that could be won using facts, logic and rational debate, as our recent experience in dealing with wokeness has shown. The

same can't be said about a reactionary right that is hellbent on gaining power by any means, and using that power to enact their agenda without compromise.

TLDR: The way for classical liberals and libertarians to 'have the cards' to play against the reactionary right, and hence prevent them from hijacking our movements and turning them into anti-freedom political forces, is simply to consciously refrain from lending our strength and support to them, and to stop them (as much as possible) from growing into a dominant position, where they can and will use that dominant position to crush freedom.

The Fault in the Right: Why Worthy Ideals Lead to Bad Politics

On the surface, different iterations of the right have championed different ideals, that I could get on board with on the surface. The right of the 1990s and the 2000s, when I was growing up, championed family values, a healthier media and culture, and a culture of personal responsibility. I could certainly get behind these ideals. However, in practice, it was all about government control and authoritarian measures, which I just couldn't accept. By the time I was in college, the right had descended into championing the Iraq War, the wider 'War on Terror', restricting civil liberties, and banning gay marriage everywhere. Their authoritarian tendencies were on full display. Later on, during the Tea Party era, libertarian ideas became more popular, which I found very encouraging, but then, they had to share a platform with conspiracy theories, which I found very frustrating. Still later on, Trump, for all his faults, did appear to move the right away from both religious authoritarianism and the forever wars, thus resolving the two biggest issues I had with the right a decade earlier. However, the religious right came back with a

vengeance soon after, and nowadays Trump himself is saying that we need a religious revival, while all the LGBT outreach that characterized his previous two campaigns seem to have disappeared quietly. It appears that the religious right has won out again under Trump's leadership, and they are even openly demanding that he embrace a national abortion ban. Even in the UK, where under the leadership of former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron it looked like there was a chance that a new, forward-looking conservatism could take hold, things rapidly turned reactionary after Brexit, and now there are concerns that Nigel Farage and his far-right Reform Party could outperform the Tories and effectively become the biggest opposition to the new Labour government. In short, the right has championed many worthy ideals that the left just won't talk about, but it all seems to end with reactionism and authoritarianism.

Not only is right-wing politics like this, right-wing influencers and public figures also bring this kind of disappointment about in the cultural sphere, because politics is downstream from culture, and they desperately want to influence the culture. I have previously talked a lot about the hijacking of the anti-woke discourse by a small number of well organized and very well-paid influencers. (Judging by their

employment in right-wing think tanks and media organizations and/or their Patreon earnings, all of them are definitely much richer than myself). Their coordinated promotion of one-sided, biased narratives have taken anti-wokeism from a very libertarian initial position (most anti-wokeists were free speech activists and/or atheists in the beginning) to a much more reactionary and authoritarian place, over the short space of a few years. This was basically the reason why the Intellectual Dark Web (IDW), which showed so much promise initially, ultimately fell apart within less than three years.

The point is, I don't disagree with what the right is saying, overall, on a broad ideals basis. I do believe that society needs more individual freedom, that a free market economy is the best model for the West, that families are the fundamental building blocks of society, that radical change based on abstract ideas is not a good idea, and that an ordered liberty is the best guarantee of freedom, because when order breaks down, nobody actually has any freedom. However, the devil is in the detail, and in the execution, many right-wing policies are unfair, ineffective, or even downright harmful, in that they make people less happy unnecessarily, or that they lead to deleterious consequences down the road (particularly in the case of climate change). This is not

caused by incompetence, but rather by the structural incentives built into the right's composition. For example, with the religious right accounting for such a big part of the right, in terms of voters, politicians and money alike, there is very little room to treat LGBT issues fairly, or to respect the pro-choice argument from a genuine pro-freedom point of view. Also, with the fossil fuel lobby being such a vested interest within the right, there is no room for pro-climate policies. The disconnect between the right's stated ideals and its actual policies give rise to the need for bad faith arguments, like how most LGBT people are 'woke activists' and thus the right's enemy (clearly untrue and unfair), or how climate change is a hoax or at least scientifically unproven (even more untrue). This is why there is a whole industry of right-aligned spin doctors out there. It is also why Millennials, my generation, have grown up with a strong distrust of the right generally, and are not moving right at the same rate as previous generations in our 30s and 40s. Those who want to believe it's only about home ownership are just not willing to face the truth.

I believe the aforementioned problem can only be exposed by someone who is sort of sympathetic to the right's stated aims in many areas, but see through the mismatch between those stated aims and the actual

policies embraced by the right. In particular, we need to pick apart the words of the spin doctors who attempt to paper over this mismatch, in the service of vested interests. Just like the anti-woke movement exposed the left's unsound ideological obsessions, we need to expose the right's distorted incentive structure, and the distorted results it produces. And just like with wokeness, only those who actually share some common ground with the right in the first place would be well positioned to expose its faults.

Why Tariffs are a Nightmare for Freedom and Peace

After I wrote an article advocating hardline opposition towards Trump's 'liberation day' antics, I received some responses questioning my hardline anti-tariff stance. I promised that I would write a post outlining my position on tariffs, i.e. why I believe the liberal use of tariffs is fundamentally illiberal. The first half of this article will still be covering this topic. However, as I wrote the post, I began thinking about something else: why was I now defending fundamental tenets of classical liberalism and libertarianism that everyone would have assumed all classical liberals and libertarians were on board with, at least before the rise of Trump? I mean, given that I have repeatedly stated my libertarian sympathies, my staunch opposition to trade protectionism would have been a given, at least from the perspective of someone reading my work in 2015. Apparently, not so much for those reading my work in 2025. But why? The second half of this article will be dedicated to exploring this question.

But first, let's talk about tariffs. My view is that tariffs are an unacceptable use of government power, because the government is actively putting their thumbs on the

scales, and choosing winners and losers in defiance of the natural operation of the invisible hand of the free market. This has always been the main argument against tariffs. While the same form of argument has been used to justify opposition to many different kinds of government intervention, tariffs are a particularly bad form of government intervention for several reasons:

Firstly, tariffs effectively make many imported goods commercially unviable and hence not available for purchase in the domestic market. This represents a direct assault on the freedom of choice of consumers, and hence is qualitatively a bigger assault on economic freedom than, say, a massive increase in income tax. Consumers might enjoy imported goods not just because they are cheaper, but rather, because such goods are simply not available domestically, because of cultural, demographic or other factors. Tariffs take this freedom of choice away, therefore leading to less freedom by definition.

Secondly, tariffs disrupt the global supply chain, often at multiple points, and make some innovations impossible or at least much more difficult. This, again, leads to less choice for the consumer. It also forces companies to have to consider government policy, which would likely include geopolitical concerns that would otherwise not

be relevant to the business, at multiple points of the production and supply processes, and to prepare to adapt to rapid changes in such policies if necessary. This greatly reduces business freedom and flexibility.

Thirdly, given that tariff levels are arbitrary, and are usually applied at different levels towards different countries and different products, this gives the government a lot of leeway to apply its power arbitrarily. Classical liberals have always been particularly skeptical of government power when it is applied arbitrarily, for good reason. In the American context, this issue is compounded by the fact that it is the President, not Congress, that sets tariff levels. Thus all this arbitrary power is in the hands of just one person. The President is really like a King when it comes to tariffs. And we have just seen the kind of havoc King Donald was able to inflict on the markets, without any checks and balances.

Fourthly, normalizing the President's power to apply tariffs in a unilateral and arbitrary way, with such profound effects across all areas of life, would inevitably mean inserting high-stakes arguments about tariffs into politics, thus creating one more issue where the electorate can be divided, polarized, and manipulated by politicians seeking power. There is a good reason why

classical liberals have long wished to remove as many issues as possible from the political contest, and turn them into a matter of private choice or market competition. This, I believe, is just as much a core characteristic of liberalism as abstract concepts like freedom and equality. It makes the political process less contested, and hence more rational and more peaceful. Re-normalizing tariffs would be a big step backwards in this regard.

Finally, tariffs inevitably lead to increased conflict between countries, and the formation of tribalist blocs of countries that are prone to persistent conflict. A less globalized economy would also mean that countries have much less incentive to avoid physical war with each other. There is a good reason why, back in the days when trade wars were the norm, actual wars involving physical violence were also the norm. The world has been much more peaceful since the advent of free trade, and we want to keep it that way. We certainly don't want the bad old days of almost constant warfare back. That would be unimaginably horrible, given that all superpowers have nuclear weapons nowadays.

Besides the fact that tariffs are bad for freedom, what's even worse here is that Trump is massively expanding the use of tariffs in a way not seen for several

generations, thus setting back the cause of individual freedom back by almost a century at least. As a libertarian reformist, I have long advocated for a gradualist approach when trying to bring about freedom, because this is the only sustainable and practically feasible way. This means that I have never agreed with the 'taxation is theft' crowd, nor do I always advocate the immediate abolition of anything that represents some kind of intrusion into individual freedom. But to take a great leap backwards like what Trump is doing now is simply unacceptable for any libertarian, period. It's just like how a libertarian wouldn't be okay with bringing back religious laws, or military conscription, or segregation, or any other anti-freedom policy that we're supposed to have moved past long ago. In other words, when it comes to freedom, I believe that immediatism is unwise, but regression, especially radical regression, is also always unacceptable. Therefore, even if it might not be realistic or desirable in the whole scheme of things to abolish all trade barriers immediately, the act of actively launching a worldwide trade war that indiscriminately targets all types of goods from basically every country on Earth is still totally unacceptable to libertarian reformists like myself.

Something weird has been happening in libertarian circles, and it has accelerated worryingly in the past few years: self-identified libertarians apparently aren't as united in opposing tariffs as they once were. The first time I saw it, it was like seeing the sun rising in the west for the first time. I mean, people who were otherwise arguing that taxation is theft (i.e. much more ardently libertarian than myself on the libertarian scale) were now saying that tariffs are a 'different' kind of taxation, and they don't count. This is ridiculous because, even a flat and relatively low tariff rate, like the 10% Trump has put on all countries except China for the time being, is still effectively a federal sales tax on all imported goods. Put it simply, there isn't a valid libertarian case for even entertaining the idea of increasing tariffs across the board, let alone actively cheering for an administration that has put international trade wars at the center of its economic policy. Libertarians are for minimal government intrusion into individual freedom, period. As I saw someone say during the 'liberation day' fiasco, it is their right if they wanted to buy a cheap T-shirt from China or Vietnam that likely isn't going to last a year, and that it should be none of the government's business that they exercise that right.

Indeed, before the rise of Trump, not only would libertarians have strongly agreed with the

aforementioned statement, so would most conservatives, most liberals, and most people in the mainstream of the Western political landscape. Seen from this perspective, the rise of Trump has had a major deleterious effect on freedom, by effectively moving the Overton window of the political landscape towards authoritarianism, where more government coercion becomes increasingly normalized. At least theoretically speaking, then, libertarians should be united in opposing Trump. However, while many libertarians (including myself) have been very vocal about our opposition to Trump and Trumpism, other self-identified libertarians have been very supportive of Trump, perhaps even more than the average conservative! This is why, in the biggest ironic moment ever, Trump was actually invited to the US Libertarian Party's convention last year, and actually spoke at that convention, trying to convince card-carrying members of the Libertarian Party to vote for him! As I said at the time, it's like a Fortune 500 CEO being invited to a socialist convention. In other words, totally ridiculous, in my humble opinion. If self-identified libertarians could become Trump curious and tariff curious, what other planks of freedom might they drop next? Stop defending free speech? Be cool with the government waging culture wars? Trump has really induced a major existential crisis in libertarianism, and

by extension, a crisis in belief in freedom itself throughout the West.

The Trump-induced crisis in libertarianism, particularly (but not limited to) American libertarianism (because it seems to have also infected Canadian and Australian libertarianism at least), has actually been going on for several years now, and I have covered this topic quite a few times. I have long maintained that I believe the biggest reason for the Trumpist infection of the libertarian movement is its long-standing adjacency to the political bloc called 'the right', and many anti-Trump libertarian observers have agreed with me on this point. Libertarianism became aligned to the right historically because of its emphasis on economic freedom. I have long questioned the wisdom of this approach, given the right's association with both religious authoritarianism and military interventionism during the Bush-43 era. However, in the Trump era, this association makes even less sense, because the Trump administration, the current standard bearer of the 'right', respects neither social freedoms like free speech, nor economic freedoms like free trade. The main disadvantage of being in 'the right' is that the libertarian movement is subject to the influence of the very well-funded right-wing influencer sphere, which has an agenda of getting everyone on board with the Trumpian agenda, for

purposes of political powerplay. Self-identified libertarians who consume too much of this propaganda often get a distorted view of the reality, and justifications for Trumpian policy on distorted, unsound, and ultimately unlibertarian grounds. The right-wing influencer sphere also exerts peer pressure on other people, from the guests going on their shows and podcasts, to (implicitly) the audience watching or listening to them, to agree with their unusually well-synchronized viewpoints. Principled libertarianism is honestly often no match for this kind of sophisticated, multi-level psychological warfare. This is a major reason why I believe libertarianism must 'leave the right' if it is to avoid being forever changed by Trumpism.

I guess if we wanted to untangle the relationship between libertarianism and 'the right', the question we need to ask is, what is 'the right', anyway? Many might say that 'the right' is simply shorthand for conservatives, but then, Trumpism is clearly not very conservative, by the standards of Burkean conservative philosophy, or even the late 20th century conservatism of Reagan and Thatcher, but nobody would question that Trump is on the 'right'. Going back to the original meaning of the word, coined during the time of the French Revolution, also doesn't work, because most of today's 'right' clearly don't support a monarchy, the very thing that defined

the French right back in the 18th century. This leaves the final possible definition: that the 'right' is simply a collection of people, groups and ideas that is skeptical about the ideas of the 'left' (by 'left' here I mean real leftism, not center-left like mainstream Democrats or Labour). These left skeptics include classical liberals, libertarians, moderates or centrists, conservatives, reactionaries and the far-right alike. Their common ground is that they disagree with ideas like postmodernism, the oppressor vs. oppressed worldview, artificially enforced equality of outcome, the idea that 'deconstructing' the status quo is good for progress, etc. However, they might not have much common ground otherwise, and they should not be lumped together into a 'right' that is forced to somewhat agree with each other. As a progressive conservative and libertarian reformist, I certainly don't have much common ground with reactionary populists who want to use state power to wage the culture wars and turn back the clock on decades of social progress. My skepticism of the left, my disagreement with leftists, is all about the model of change that society should adopt, and certainly not about whether society should be inclusive and fair towards minorities, for example.

This is why, ultimately, I believe that for libertarianism to thrive, or at least to stop being contaminated by

authoritarian reactionary ideologies it should have nothing to do with, the very idea of 'the right' needs to be challenged. People who are skeptical of the philosophy of the 'left' might nevertheless have strong and valid disagreements with each other, and should not be pressured to form a 'coalition', where the loudest and most well-funded elements get to set the agenda for everyone. The political construct of 'the right' is simply a way to enslave free thinking left-skeptics to an agenda funded by billionaires for their own benefit, whether it be Trumpism, neoconservatism, or some other thing. This is why the dismantling of the idea of 'the right' is necessary for the liberation of libertarianism.

Why the Republican Party Will Never Stand for Peace

This article explains my persistently skeptical attitude towards the US Republican Party and its close allies in other English-speaking countries. However, let's start with some recent events. With the Trump administration embroiled in the unpopular Iran War, several online influencers known for peddling extremely distasteful antisemitic ideas, like Candace Owens and Nick Fuentes, have been gaining audiences at an unprecedented rate. I think the reason so many people, mainly Trump supporters and former Trump supporters, are buying into the groundless and often antisemitic conspiracy theories about the Iran War is because they can't face the truth: that Trump, who ran on an anti-war banner for 10 years, has now suddenly morphed into everything he said he wouldn't be. In other words, he said he was different, but he turned out to be more of the same. And disappointed Trump fans are now latching onto an explanation, any explanation, as to why he turned out to be such a disappointment.

The fact is, the 100% American born and bred neocon war-hawk machine is, alone, responsible for all the endless, needless wars. Over the years, various sections of the media, for various reasons, have provided cover for the neocon war-hawk machine, by blaming someone else for the lack of peace in our world. It's the communists. It's the Islamists. It's Iraq. It's Iran. It's North Korea. It's Cuba. It's anyone but the neocon war-hawks of America. It is this blaming everyone else but the true culprit that has created fertile ground for the conspiracy theories. The continual demonization of the Democratic Party by right-aligned media outlets, both old and new, backed by big sums of money, also plays a role in blinding people to the fact that the problem is right there, in the Republican Party. Contrary to popular belief, they are not the good guys trying to stop the 'Demonrats'. They are, instead, the world's biggest and most powerful pro-war party. (This is also why I've always considered the Democrats to be at least the lesser evil, even during their period of embracing peak wokeness. Even peak woke is objectively the lesser evil compared to war-hawkism. I believe the only party that is capable of stopping the worst war-hawks in the world from gaining power should at least get the benefit of the doubt as the lesser evil, even for all their other faults, which I admit there are many.)

The truth is, Trump failed to fundamentally change the Republican Party when it comes to their pro-war nature. Instead, the Republicans changed Trump, at least in this regard. As much as I dislike Trump, I believe he was sincerely anti-war when he first went into politics. But to survive and thrive in the Republican Party, one needs to adapt to its power structure. Trump is very adept at this. It's why he is President and Ron Paul isn't. That Trump has been able to change Republicans for the worse on everything from the bipartisan agreement on constitutional guardrails, to the fundamental respect for science and scientists, to support for free trade, but has had to bend to pre-existing Republican attitudes on the matter of war, just demonstrates how much stronger the pre-existing Republican commitment to being pro-war was, compared to their other pre-existing commitments. This is why I think the whole trajectory of the interaction between Trump and the Republican Party has demonstrated that the modern Republican Party is, at heart, primarily a party dedicated to a pro-war agenda, more than anything else. That it also has several members with anti-war commitments and libertarian leanings doesn't change this. It just provides a cover of plausible deniability for the war-hawks. As recent events have demonstrated, Ron Paul and Rand Paul have never had any influence whatsoever on their own party, when

it comes to matters concerning war. And those who have become too much of a thorn on the side of the war-mongerers can be easily gotten rid of, as Thomas Massie and Tulsi Gabbard have found out. The Republican Party is simply no place for peace loving people, period.

I also need to say something about JD Vance, and his supposedly anti-war credentials here. It is true that Vance appears to be not very enthusiastic about the Iran War, and is overall less of a war-hawk than Marco Rubio is (but then, almost everyone is less of a war-hawk than Marco Rubio). However, his ideological commitments and alliances are not those that sit comfortably with a consistently pro-peace worldview. Vance is known to be aligned with several hard right ideological factions. In particular, he is aligned with National Conservatism, also known as NatCon. This faction centers a nationalist-inflected religious identity in its politics, which in practice means it supports what is now often known as Christian Nationalism in American and Western contexts. What is now often known as Christian Nationalism is basically what we used to call the 'religious right' back in the aughts under Bush-43, and those of us who are old enough to remember know that they were fully signed up to Bush's and Cheney's neocon war-hawk agenda, including the 'War on Terror' in

general, and the Iraq War in particular. The religious right were among the loudest voices calling those opposing the war 'unpatriotic', calling for the cancellation of the Dixie Chicks. They also played an important role in hyping up the war by saying that Islam is 'incompatible with Western civilization' and hence the enemy, justified by linking Western culture to their Republicanized version of Christianity (you see, all this didn't begin under Trump!). Also, even though it was before my lifetime, I know full well that the religious right fully supported Cold War war-hawkism, in the name of Christian anti-communism. The fact is, the religious right, with their strong us vs them worldview, has never been, and will never be, a friend of peace. The religious right has always been an important part of the Republican war-hawk machine, its role being to uphold a Republican war-hawk friendly version of Christianity to justify the Republican war-hawk agenda, to get Christians who might otherwise be concerned about the human costs of war on board with the agenda. If Vance is aligned with them, he is not going to be a reliable ally for peace either. Vance's acquiescence to Trump and Rubio over the Iran War is already a sign of his priorities, and the weakness of his supposedly anti-war position. If Vance is eventually asked to choose between peace and

the religious right's favor, I'm not optimistic about the chances of peace winning out.

Finally, I need to talk about the Republican Party's close allies in other Western countries, and the sinister stuff that I think is happening on that front. The Republican Party's traditionally closest allies are the British Conservatives, the Canadian Conservatives, and the Australian Liberal-National Coalition. Not all conservative parties are aligned with the Republicans and their war-hawk agenda: the French conservatives have always been skeptical of American interventionism, and they largely opposed the 2003 Iraq War under then-President Jacques Chirac, for example. But the English-speaking right wing have always been largely on board, the 2003 Iraq War example being then-Australian Prime Minister John Howard. While the UK under Tony Blair was the largest member of the 'Coalition of the Willing', the ambivalence and internally conflicted attitude of Blair's Labour government in contrast to the all-in-with-Bush attitude across the Howard government demonstrates clearly who are the Republicans' friends. However, over time, as the US Republicans moved further right but the conservatives in other English-speaking countries moved to the center, this alliance weakened considerably, especially in the 2010s. During the first Trump term, the British Conservatives under

Theresa May were not very keen on being pro-Trump, and then-Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also had plenty of disagreements with Trump. I think it is for this reason that the American Right are now trying to prop up further-right political parties, like Reform UK and One Nation in Australia, in an attempt to supplant the traditional conservative parties, and provide more reliable allies for the Republican war-hawk agenda. This is because, ultimately, America cannot go to war alone in the long term (the current war demonstrates very well the problems with America going it alone). The Republican war-hawk machine needs reliable allies, and I believe they are trying to meddle in the politics of other countries to create those allies, so they won't have the problem of another Keir Starmer refusing to join America's war in the future. I believe this is what the 'global rise of the populist New Right' actually is, and this is why we should all resist the rise of the New Right, rather than normalize and accommodate them.

This is How to Save Libertarianism from the Populist Right

Ever since the Mises Caucus takeover of the US Libertarian Party and the resulting civil war inside that party, the libertarian brand has been weak and tarnished. This has come at a very unfortunate time, as authoritarian forces are on the rise across the West. Just when we need libertarianism to be strong, she is badly wounded. As I have said before, while I'm not a libertarian immediatist, libertarianism has long been an important part of the Western political landscape, holding the destructive ambitions of self-righteous wannabe authoritarians at bay. A West without libertarianism would likely descend into competing groups of authoritarians with religious zeal fighting over who gets to shove their beliefs down other people's throats. This is why we need to save libertarianism.

Some people have suggested that libertarianism won't die out completely, but it might live on under other labels. I personally can't accept this. I can't agree to give up the name of the movement that played an important role in opposing the authoritarian excesses of the 'War on Terror', opposing the Iraq War, supporting gay

marriage and standing for free speech against cancel culture. Some have suggested that libertarians simply join the neoliberals. However, this is unsatisfactory, not just because freedom-loving libertarianism is simply very different from technocratic neoliberalism, but also because we have genuine irreconcilable differences in worldview. Neoliberals have never shared the libertarian passion for non-violence and world peace. Now things are actually getting worse because the neoliberals have decided to welcome into their tent neoconservative hawks who have become refugees from the Trumpified Republican Party. While I have some sympathy towards old-school Republicans being forced out of their party by Trumpism, simply because there is a clear parallel to what is happening to libertarianism, and to the woke skeptical movement I consider myself a part of, this sympathy doesn't extend to willingness to be in the same tent as neocon hawks. After all, opposition to the 2003 Iraq War was how I first got into politics, and my attraction to libertarianism began with its anti-war stance back then. Peace-loving libertarians being forced into a tent with those who have the opposite view is definitely a bridge too far for me.

What we also need to remember here is that the US Libertarian Party, or even the kind of libertarianism it represents, don't actually own the libertarian label.

There are civil libertarians, geolibertarians, green libertarians, libertarian socialists, and so on, and since a few years ago, Moral Libertarians. The l-word is everywhere across the political spectrum, and the Mises Caucus can't change that. What we need to do is find the common ground between these different types of libertarians, as well as other people who might love freedom but are not yet using the libertarian label, and bring them together. Together, we are much larger than the reactionaries in the Mises Caucus will ever be.

To get this done, we will need to actively attempt to transcend traditional left-right boundaries. I believe this will actually be a good thing, because for far too long, English-speaking libertarianism has unjustifiably leaned too closely to the right, which is a major reason for the Mises takeover being able to happen in the first place. Detaching libertarianism from the right, and making it a truly left-right cross-spectrum thing, will prevent right-wing reactionaries from devouring the libertarian brand, and also prevent a Mises-style takeover from even being able to happen again in the future.

We should also remember that the original reason why libertarians tend to make alliances with the right was because the right once stood for economic freedom. However, nowadays, the Right loves Trumpist

protectionism, and they worship Viktor Orban's Hungary, which is ranked a lowly 72nd on the Heritage Foundation's index of economic freedom. The fact that they want the West to emulate a country with less economic freedom than the US, UK and most other Western countries shows that they don't believe in economic freedom. They only believe in culture wars, which is what Hungarian politics is most known for in the West. Ironically, Scandinavian social democracy, the model most often admired by the English-speaking left, actually offers a lot more economic freedom. Denmark, Sweden and Norway all rank inside the top 10 in the aforementioned index! This just shows that the 20th century idea that the right is better for economic freedom is very outdated indeed. It's time to break free from these old stereotypes.

III. More on the Authoritarian Sins of the Right

Why 'Populism' is Not Compatible with Good Democracy

Is the so-called ‘populist right’ part of the new normal now, and can they be just regarded as part of our normal democratic process? Damon Linker appears to answer ‘yes’ to both questions, in his article Populism Is Part of Our Political Fabric Now published in Persuasion. Here, I am going to reply to Linker’s arguments in that article, because, unlike him, I’ve decided that the answer is actually ‘no’ to both questions, after much soul searching.

In the article, Linker observes that ‘we now reside in a world in which centrist liberals and right-populists are the primary forces vying for power, oscillating between ruling and standing in opposition’. However, is this even true? To support his claims, Linker lists the countries where the populist right supposedly won power, namely ‘Turkey, India, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Brazil, Argentina, Japan, Chile’ and America, and also three more countries where they are ‘within striking distance’, namely ‘the United Kingdom, France, and Germany’. However, we should examine this list more closely. Turkey, India and

Japan are not Western countries, and their politics cannot be neatly shoehorned into Western categories. In Eastern Europe and South America, the political landscape has long contained more illiberal elements, and liberal democracy has never been established to the same extent as in the West (narrowly defined as Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand). Illiberalism has long been normalized in these places, as seen in the fact that Hungary's Orban was first elected 16 years ago, and Chile's Pinochet came to power all the way back in 1973. Meanwhile, Italy's Meloni has governed largely as a conventional conservative, and the populists in European countries like the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and Austria have only been able to be part of a conservative coalition that includes other non-populist parties too, thus limiting their power (and in the case of the Netherlands, causing the right-wing government to fall and be replaced by a liberal-progressive one in just one year). In the United Kingdom, France and Germany, populists might be leading in the polls, but they have well under 50% support, so it is not certain that they will come to power anytime soon. In Australia, the populists and the traditional conservatives seem to both have a quarter of the electorate's support, thus roughly evenly dividing the right side of politics. Even in America, where the

populist right's global spiritual leader Donald Trump currently occupies the White House, his MAGA coalition has increasingly fractured and peeled away in all directions since he returned to power, and it is far from certain that any Republican can succeed Trump in leading this coalition at all.

Overall, the effect of the 'populist right' has been to inject uncertainty and unpredictability into politics, rather than to take conventional conservatism's place as one of the two major factions alternating between being in and out of power. The reason is that they simply don't have the required level of support yet. In countries like America and France, the populists appear to have most of the right, but there are still some old-school conservative holdouts who might consider voting liberal over populist if forced to choose. In countries like Germany and Australia, the populists and the conservatives basically divide the right evenly, with no clear permanent winner yet. In countries like the UK, it's somewhere in between, the populists are ahead but the conservatives are far from defeated. In all of these places, the populists haven't been able to 'unite the right' conclusively yet. This is why we are having this period of instability. There is still hope that the populist wave can recede, and the right can be occupied by some other force instead (likely to be a return to conventional

conservatism). Therefore, those of us who are opposed to the 'populist right' shouldn't just surrender and normalize the 'populist right' at this point. It would be as if the Allies suddenly sued for peace with Nazi Germany in 1943 just because they were sick of fighting. Imagine how different the 20th century would have turned out if that had happened. (Not to say that the 'populist right' are Nazis, but I think this is a very useful analogy to focus our thoughts.)

The next question is whether the 'populist right' can co-exist alongside liberals in a healthy democratic system. Linker concludes that they can, because 'there's nothing intrinsic to right-populist policy commitments that necessitates rigging a country's electoral system to benefit one party over another'. Elsewhere, he states clearly that he thinks the populist right 'can retain most of their substantive policy commitments without eroding fundamental democratic institutions, like Orban did and Trump is attempting to do'. He seems to put Orban's and Trump's undemocratic tendencies down to their personalities, and imagine that a 'populist right' led by someone with a more regular personality wouldn't necessarily lead to the erosion of democracy. However, I need to question his premise of defining the 'populist right' by policy commitments in the first place. Linker seems to think that the 'populist right' is defined

primarily by policy commitments like ‘immigration restrictions, protectionist trade policies, and socially conservative viewpoints’, as well as ‘questions of collective identity’. I disagree. Social conservatism, to the degree that it should actually be called reactionism, was a hallmark of many 20th century ‘fusionist’ conservative administrations, because the ‘three legged stool’ of fusionism actually included the religious right, which has always wanted things like total abortion bans and anti-sodomy laws. During the Bush administration, there were very ugly culture wars around gay marriage, for example. ‘Questions of collective identity’ were also clearly on the agenda during that time. Bush-era culture wars included everything from the Merry Christmas vs Seasons Greetings war, to the whole ‘debate’ about whether Islam was compatible with the West, to opposition to government services in Spanish and calls for English to be made America’s official language. Protectionist trade policies appear to be specific to Trump, there doesn’t appear to be a unified stance on trade policy among the ‘populist right’ globally (or even in the US Republican Party). Argentina’s Milei is actually very pro-free trade, and has actually reduced tariffs, for example. This leaves immigration restriction as the only substantial policy commitment that is truly a hallmark of the ‘populist right’ in every country. And immigration is

indeed the issue where the 'populist right' won most of their support. More on that later.

The fact is, the 'populist right' does not represent a clear set of policy commitments that is also clearly different from conventional conservatism, except on the one issue of immigration. Rather, what sets the 'populist right' apart from conservatives is the way they do politics. The populist right relies on emotive messaging, rather than rational persuasion, to gain support. It enjoys exploiting existing problems, conflicts and frustrations, and attempts to extract the biggest political benefit from it, while ignoring the very real harms caused to society in terms of increased polarization and tribalism, and reduced rationality and mutual understanding. In other words, 'populists', in their ruthless pursuit of power, aren't above tearing our social fabric apart and increasing hate and animosity in society in the process. I've seen this happen in real time, to my dismay, in areas of debate from immigration, to LGBT issues, to COVID-era frustrations, and frankly I've had enough. And this certainly isn't a Trump-only problem either. Many of the aforementioned issues were first made into battlegrounds by online influencers, and only later taken up by Trump. Moreover, all of Trump's potential successors have demonstrated a willingness to continue this emotionally driven, negative-tribalism

based mode of politics. The next 'populist right' leader might not exactly sound like Trump, but they will certainly be using a largely similar approach to playing the game of politics.

As a classical liberal, I see my work as about increasing mutual understanding, encouraging good faith rational conversation, and bringing about consensus as a result of that. The 'populist right' apparently wants the opposite of all this, because they enjoy having the problem heated and unresolved, so that they can extract political benefit from it. This, I think, makes the 'populist right' incompatible with democracy. A healthy democracy requires people to be able to have rational conversations, to come to an understanding about a shared reality, and to make informed decisions at the ballot box based on that. In a political landscape where the 'populist right' makes rational debate and informed decision making impossible, even if elections keep happening it would be a very 'flawed democracy', not the healthy kind of democracy we should all aspire to. And I strongly believe we should not settle for a future where the people who come after us have to live under a flawed democracy, just because we lack the will to call out and stand against the worst features of the 'populist right' when we still can. Again, it would be as if the Allies suddenly sued for peace with Nazi Germany in

1943 just because they were sick of fighting. I think all of us would agree that it would be deeply irresponsible and tragic if that had happened.

I also have to briefly talk about Linker's assertion that 'there's nothing intrinsic to right-populist policy commitments that necessitates rigging a country's electoral system'. This might be true on a theoretical level, but not when it comes to practically doing politics. The reason is because the emotional appeal of the 'populist right' approach to politics lends itself to justify a whatever it takes attitude towards elections. This has actually been happening in real time, with the mid-decade gerrymandering wars that Trump is undertaking. The gerrymandering has been explicitly sold to MAGA supporters as necessary to ensure the victory of the Trump agenda (over the supposedly open borders, defund the police Democratic agenda), and the MAGA base has largely eaten it up (because they truly believe all those lies about the Democrats, as a result of the 'populist' emotional programming). This is why Republicans in many red states have been effectively forced to follow Trump's lead into the gerrymandering war, whether they like it or not. And when they resist, as some of them did in Indiana, they are primaried by MAGA voters, who see their refusal as betrayal to their movement. I think the US-wide gerrymandering wars of

2025-26 has proven once and for all that a ‘populist right’ political movement can never just be content with playing by the rules everyone has agreed to, and agreeing to accept winning or losing on that playing field. Instead, its very nature is to attempt to tilt that playing field as far to its own advantage as possible every single time, as long as they can get away with it. The behavior of Trump and Orban in this regard is therefore not a bug, but a feature.

All this does not mean we should just dismiss the concerns of those who currently support ‘populist right’ parties and politicians. It would be indeed undemocratic if we did so. Wanting more restricted immigration, for example, is indeed a legitimate demand, and it would be undemocratic if liberal politicians simply ignored it, or worse, reflexively labelled it as racist. Liberals should try to satisfy this demand without resorting to the human rights violations that the ‘populist right’ is well known for in this area. Liberals should also be true to our intentions to uphold democracy, which would have to include a strong respect for free speech. This, in turn, means that we need to push back on anti-free speech postmodernist and Marcusean ideas, ideas which are just as incompatible with liberal democracy as the ‘populist right’. Finally, calling supporters of the ‘populist right’ a ‘basket of deplorables’ a-la-Hillary should be

beyond the pale for any true supporter of liberal democracy. All these are things we shouldn't forget, even as we take a strong stance against the ruthless, irresponsible, will-to-power above all brand of politics represented by the leaders of the 'populist right'.

There Really is a Woke Right, and it is a Grave Threat to Freedom

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion about whether there is a 'woke right'. Some moderates have long used the term 'woke right' to describe reactionary right-wing culture warriors who engage in cancel culture and other forms of free speech denial, but this term was only embraced by a small minority, until James Lindsay and several other key influencers on the right began promoting it in recent months. As you might expect, some on the right have been quite defensive, and dismissive of the idea that the right can be 'woke' too, going so far as to accuse Lindsay and others of promoting left-wing ideas (this clearly has the same energy as far-left activists trying to paint Barack Obama and Joe Biden as right-wing). It is in this context, particularly the right's defensive, tribalist and almost anti-intellectual response, that I began thinking about whether a 'woke right' might indeed exist.

When a few people began talking about the 'woke right' two or three years ago, my initial attitude was skeptical. After all, wokeness arose from postmodernism and critical theory, philosophies which are firmly rooted in

the left, and have only been (openly) embraced by left-wing people and movements. Just because something looks similar to woke doesn't make it woke. I mean, Christian and Islamic fundamentalism are authoritarian and anti-LGBT, and so is fascism, but religious fundamentalism and fascism are clearly two different things.

However, over time, I have observed that the similarities between the woke left and the new movement of culture warriors on the right are simply too many to ignore. Both despise free speech, and distrust the marketplace of ideas to the point that they believe they have to actively shut down speech and ideas they disagree with, often using unscrupulous means. This, ultimately, stems from a belief on both sides that society and culture are controlled by an all-pervasive power structure, that would not allow the truth to emerge simply from free speech and free debate. There's a clear oppressor vs oppressed worldview at work here on both sides, although there is clearly disagreement on which groups are the oppressor and which groups are the oppressed. There's also a 'let's turn the tables of oppression', revenge on the oppressors is legitimate feeling on both sides, and the 'oppressors' are seen as one indistinguishable bloc, so it would be okay to hurt all of them without considering individual guilt or lack

thereof. Above all, for both sides, the biggest goal of politics is to dismantle the power structure and disarm those who are propping up the power structure, and this has to be done at all costs, including costs to individual liberty, as well as actual harms to actual people. The last point is important, because not many ideologies in the modern West would condone this 'whatever it takes', 'the ends justify the means' attitude, for good reason.

It is clear from the above analysis that the woke left and the New Right culture warriors share not only superficial similarities or even just tactics, but rather, they ultimately share the same kind of worldview about culture, human nature and the general epistemology of society. Given this, I think we are talking less about two things that are only superficially similar like fascism vs religious authoritarianism here, but rather two things that actually share the same core nature, like Italian fascism and German Nazism. Just like we can put both Italian fascism and German Nazism under the same general umbrella called 'fascism', I think we can justifiably put both the 'woke left' and the 'woke right' under the same general umbrella called 'wokeism'. Indeed, failing to do so would severely limit, and even distort, our view of reality.

This still leaves the problem of the clear influence of postmodern critical theory on the left, and the lack of such influence in explicit terms on the right. However, the same idea can go by different names, or be described in different terms, in different cultures and contexts (and the left and the right are clearly different cultures in the modern West). An apple might not be called an apple in Japan, simply because they speak a different language, but this wouldn't make it not an apple. If I went to a store in Tokyo and bought a 'ringo', it would still taste very similar to the apples from my local supermarket, and they would still be essentially the same thing. The ultimate answer as to whether the New Right culture warriors are actually 'woke' is whether they share the essence of the critical theory mode of thinking, not whether they speak the language of postmodern critical theory per se.

To answer the question of whether the New Right embodies the essence of wokeness, we need to turn to the actual theory they write, read, believe and practice. Contrary to popular belief, New Right theory is as much a real thing as New Left theory. From what I've observed, the Neoreaction movement, inspired by the writings of Curtis Yarvin and Nick Land, represent the most influential faction of New Right theory so far. Many New Right intellectuals, including soon-to-be Vice

President JD Vance, have expressed sympathy towards Yarvin's writings. The neoreactionary idea that there is a 'cathedral' centered in journalism and academia, controlling society's culture, right down to the way people think subconsciously, akin to the Catholic Church in the middle ages, is clearly analogous to how the various critical theories claim that our society is fundamentally shaped by the 'systems' of white supremacy, patriarchy and heteronormativity. Moreover, the all-encompassing pernicious control of both the 'cathedral' and the 'systems of oppression' are made invisible to, and/or taken for granted by the majority of the public, and only apparent to those who have been enlightened ('red-pilled' or 'awoken') by the relevant theory. Furthermore, given the all-encompassing nature of the influence of both the 'cathedral' and the 'systems of oppression', there is no way to fairly debate ideas and achieve good outcomes in the current society. Dismantling the 'cathedral' or the 'systems of oppression' is the most important goal in politics, and must be achieved no matter the costs to individual freedom, peace and the immediate welfare of citizens.

Seen in this way, neoreactionism is basically a form of critical theory, one that paints a picture of the systemic oppression of liberalism against cultural reactionaries. In this worldview, the oppressors are university academics,

experts and liberal journalists, and the history of this oppression actually began with the Whigs in England several centuries ago. Just like with oppressor vs oppressed critical theory in general, there is no nuance displayed, no consideration for differences between individuals, and no role for individual agency at all. All individuals are inevitably seen as just parts of the system, whether they like it or not. Moreover, occasionally, demographic groups seen as supported by the aforementioned classes, e.g. LGBT people, could be identified with the oppressors too, in a similar way to how the most extreme woke-leftists insist that 'all men' are responsible for patriarchy, or that 'all white people' are responsible for white supremacy. The oppressed here are supposedly the general public which have been harmed by the liberal ideas coming from the aforementioned institutions. However, we must remember that, even though many of us have valid criticisms of academia and mainstream media, there isn't actually objective evidence that society has been fundamentally harmed in a systemic way by these institutions as a whole. Rather, given that it is only in the neoreactionary worldview that this is the case, the oppressed are actually only those who hold neoreactionary or adjacent beliefs, projecting their feelings of oppression onto the rest of the population.

This is similar to how critical race theory claims to speak for all black people, or how radical feminism and postmodern feminism pretend to speak for all women.

The neoreactionary's feelings of 'oppression' are largely rooted in their inability to live in their utopia free of the influence of liberal and left-of-center ideas, which they blame the 'oppressors' in academia and media for foistering on society. This is analogous to Herbert Marcuse's view in Repressive Tolerance that the existence, expression and influence of conservative ideas in society represents unacceptable repression and oppression that justifies illiberal means to combat it. Of course, these people tend to forget that nobody gets to choose to live in a society devoid of ideas they don't like. Also, there are good reasons why most of us wouldn't want to live in a society where all abortion and divorce is illegal, where homosexuality is illegal, or where freedom of expression is limited by Taliban-style religious laws, and we're not brainwashed by academia and mainstream media to think this way. Of course, viewing the simple existence of difference in opinion and not getting your way sometimes as 'oppression', and those who disagree as 'oppressors', fantasizing that such 'oppression' has come about as a result of nefarious hidden powerful forces, as well as irrationally extrapolating one's own feelings of 'oppression' to a

much wider population, are all hallmarks of the most extreme kind of woke thinking.

Besides neoreactionism, other parts of the New Right also exhibit critical theory-like thinking. For example, Patrick Deneen has called for a 'regime change' in America. He decries the status quo as some kind of 'tyranny', where genuine conservatism has been made impossible by the dominance of liberalism. Through this, he justifies a radical reordering of everything through illiberal means, which would ultimately pave the way for his utopia of the supposed 'common good'. This lines up with the aforementioned neoreaction worldview (even though Deneen, as far as I'm aware, is not a neoreactionary), and also with the general format of postmodern critical theory thinking. Similarly, Christopher Rufo has argued that the radical left has 'conquered everything', using cherry-picked evidence, to justify the idea that an illiberal 'counter-revolution' is needed. Again, this selective use of evidence to create a narrative of power imbalance, to justify an illiberal politics, fits very well into the basic format of critical theory. Moreover, Rufo once said of critical race theory that 'we will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category', demonstrating a willingness to resort to dishonest tactics which pollute the cultural discourse in order to

achieve political ends. My regular audience would know how strongly I feel about opposing critical race theory, yet this dishonest and politically motivated approach is something that I vehemently oppose. The disrespect of objective truth, and the underlying view of speech and discourse as a device for power is all very postmodern. Overall, using selective anecdotal evidence to create a narrative of liberal cultural dominance and systemic oppression of 'conservatives', and justification of illiberal (and often dishonest) action to remedy this 'oppression', is a recurring theme throughout the New Right's intellectual output. Thus, the New Right's worldview clearly fits into the genre of critical theory, even if New Right intellectuals don't actually speak the same language as leftist critical theorists.

In conclusion, there is plenty of evidence to prove that the New Right culture warriors do, in fact, share the essence of woke thinking. Therefore, they can justifiably be called the 'woke right'. (After all, if the 'woke right' really didn't exist, why would there be such an overreaction to Lindsay et al.? This overreaction really smells just like how the woke left overreacted to Jordan Peterson back in 2018! Which clearly means they have something to hide.) Indeed, any discussion of wokeness that does not include the 'woke right' would be incomplete, and making conclusions based on

incomplete evidence is always going to be inherently biased. Therefore, I believe that any future criticisms of wokeness going forward must also include the 'woke right', to capture the whole spectrum of woke thinking. Also, given that the woke right is already weaponizing the existence of the woke left to justify its own authoritarian moves, it is becoming more and more urgent that we develop a new woke-critical narrative that covers both the woke left and the woke right.

Is the New Right Actually That New?

In recent years, much has been said about the populist, illiberal 'New Right', including by myself. Up until now, I have focused on the philosophical side of the New Right, which I have found quite scary. The philosophical New Right's total repudiation of classical liberal values, all the way back to old British Whiggism, is of huge concern to anyone who supports freedom. I believe it is very important that we give some timely pushback to this philosophical movement to erode liberalism and justify the use of arbitrary power. However, today I will look at what the New Right actually does in terms of real world political actions. Surprisingly, it doesn't actually appear to be so new, after all. And through this observation, I think we actually learn something important about the 'New Right'.

First, we have the culture wars. Those are certainly not new. Boycotting companies for being too liberal isn't new. Even the War on Disney isn't new. In 1996, there was a boycott of The Hunchback of Notre Dame, not because of the movie's contents, but because of Disney's pro-gay policies. Manufactured outrage isn't

new. The supposed liberals' War on Christmas was an annually recurring talking point during the nineties and the aughts. It was just as manufactured as this year's Biden's War on Easter. Book bans certainly aren't new: when I was in high school and college, there were attempts at removing from libraries everything from Harry Potter to the Da Vinci Code. Moral panics and outrage are not new either: the right used to get very upset about everything from video games to rap music. Anyone who remembers the right in the nineties and the aughts would remember that they were certainly not live and let live at all.

Next, we have the anti-science and anti-intellectual attitudes. Those are not new either. Back when I was in college, there was a big push by the religious right to get schools to teach creationism, under the pseudo-scientific label 'intelligent design', and to paint evolution as 'just a theory, not proven fact'. Earlier on, there was the attempt to hinder taking HIV/AIDS seriously, by promoting the idea that AIDS was 'God's punishment for homosexuality'. The conspiracy-minded thinking is not new either. Intellectuals and scientists, as well as Hollywood, were not to be trusted, because they were 'Godless liberal elites' out to poison your kids' minds and turn them against Christian values. Almost every Democrat, from Bill Clinton to Al Gore to John Kerry was

supposedly a closet communist. Not to mention all the talk about the 'New World Order', which was not that different from QAnon actually.

Even the idea that the state should wield its power over the culture wars is not new. Back in 2005, right-wingers across the American South advocated requiring biology textbooks to carry a sticker saying that evolution was not proven fact. The year before, state constitutional amendments banning gay marriage, and in some cases even civil unions, swept across America. Calls to increase censorship of the media and the music industry were frequent, often coinciding with waves of moral panic about hip-hop culture, rock music and Hollywood. And let's not forget the attempt to end no-fault divorce through 'covenant marriage', which was quite fashionable on the right for a while during the nineties.

The fact is, what the New Right wants to do is basically what the old right was doing, up until around the mid-aughts. The main difference is that the old right did these things while paying lip service to individual freedom and Burkean conservatism, while the New Right has no such pretenses. The reason is because such hypocrisy could no longer stand up to scrutiny. Back in the aughts, the rise of libertarianism associated with the backlash to the 2003 Iraq War, and the rise of the

internet as a platform for political discussion, meant that the hypocrisy of saying you're for freedom while promoting authoritarian policies simply became untenable.

At first, there was an attempt to modernize the right. This would have finally aligned the right's policies in reality with their supposedly long-standing commitments to small government and individual liberty. However, the reactionary culture warriors clearly didn't like this plan, and began pushing back. The push to elect Trump in 2016 was the beginning of this. Afterwards, books against liberalism began to appear. Instead of realigning the right's actions towards a true commitment to liberty, they want to realign the right's philosophy to allow their own authoritarian agendas to continue.

During the right's brief attempt at finally making good on their commitment to liberty, I had an opportunity to realize that the right was not entirely bad or wrong. In particular, I had the opportunity to appreciate how genuine conservative philosophy could provide important arguments for protecting freedom, against the onslaught of misguided radicals. It is sad that this more honest version of the right was cut short by the

reactionaries. I guess the only way to bring it back would be by comprehensively defeating the illiberal New Right.

As for how we should fight the illiberal 'New Right', I think we could look at their philosophy and their real world actions sort of separately. We need to continue to develop arguments against their illiberal political philosophy, because it is indeed something new, and designed to justify real world authoritarianism in new ways. However, when it comes to their real world actions, we should recognize that they are not that new. We've seen it all before, and even defeated it with arguments from fact, logic, science, compassion, and yes, individual freedom. We just need to do it all over again. If the illiberal reactionaries could pick up where they left off in 2006, we can too. This would actually require us to re-embrace facts, logic and individual freedom, which would also mean a decisive rejection of postmodernism in all forms. This is why we can, and should, oppose the postmodern-critical left and the illiberal right using the same platform and the same set of arguments.

Here, we should note that there are two minor but important differences between the New Right and the old religious right. The first is their avoidance of overtly using religious justifications. A good example is the

recently passed law in Louisiana mandating the display of the Ten Commandments in every classroom in every public school and public university by law. The US Supreme Court previously found laws requiring such religious displays unconstitutional in 1980, but this time they are justifying it on the importance of 'foundational documents of our state and national government'. The law also states The Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and the Northwest Ordinance as foundational documents, but they are not required to be displayed in the same way. This just demonstrates that it is not about foundational documents at all. If it was, then these documents, along with the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and perhaps the Magna Carta, among other items, would need to be displayed too. Classrooms would literally have their walls covered by text, from wall to wall. But no, they only require the Ten Commandments to be displayed. It is clearly about religion, not 'foundational documents'. I guess going forward, we really need to take an 'if is walks like a duck, if it quacks like a duck' approach towards the religious right. If it looks like an act of forcing religion down people's throats, then it needs to be treated as one, no matter how it is being framed.

The second difference, which is related to the first, is that the new religious right likes to argue that their

policies are required to 'fight wokeness'. Of course, this is utter rubbish, and also a dishonest attempt at distracting from the religiously inspired nature of their actions. What we need to remember here is that, while classical liberals and the religious right might both be opposed to wokeness, it is for very different reasons. Classical liberals oppose wokeness because we are concerned about its impact on individual freedom. On the other hand, the religious right oppose wokeness only because it often goes against their religious doctrines. If given half the chance, the religious right would seek to impose authoritarian policies that are no less horrible than what extreme wokeism would do. From an individual liberty point of view, the religious right is at least as bad as extreme wokeness, if not actually worse. There literally is no common ground between classical liberals and the religious right, even if we both oppose wokeness.

The Reactionary Rabbit Hole of Competitive Outrage

I'm going to talk about an increasingly worrying phenomenon: the rise of competitive outrage on the right. This is perhaps one of the things most characteristic of how the populist New Right is different from old-school conservative politics. Think of it as the mirror image of the 'oppression olympics'. Instead of competing to be the most oppressed, however, it seems like many in the populist right like to compete to be the most outraged. We are seeing this phenomenon more and more often in both political influencers and actual politicians making policies. And this has some worrying consequences.

Firstly, competitive outrage always results in whipping up people's emotions, and bringing out the worst in people. It leads to irrationality, tribalism, and even open bigotry and hate towards certain groups. And because you win the game by acting more outraged than other people on your side, and promising ever harsher actions against perceived enemies, there is no circuit breaker here. Nobody can call out others on their own side for going too far, because they would be perceived as

'weak', and also lose the game of competitive outrage by definition. Hence, things can only get angrier, more irrational, more detached from reality, and more outrageous as time goes on.

Many might think that competitive outrage is only something that happens online, among political influencers and users of social media. However, it is clear that this is not the case. Populist right politicians' talking points about immigrants, LGBT people, and 'liberal elites' have been getting darker and more divisive in the past few years. And it has also affected policy making, with ever increasing numbers of anti-LGBT bills being filed every year across America and the West for example. The truth here is, populist right-aligned politicians have to keep filing these bills, even though they are unnecessary because they all look similar to each other, because they have to show that they are outraged, and will respond in a 'strong' way. If they don't do this, they could get primaried and lose their career. Over time, the content of those bills have also gotten more and more outrageous. There is clearly no room for rational thinking, compassion or compromise, even in policy making, when everything is driven by competitive outrage.

The ultimate effect of competitive outrage is likely going to be the total triumph of reactionism in right-of-center politics, and the complete death of organicist conservatism. This is because competitive outrage always ends up favoring the most reactionary points of view, and is always incompatible with the rationality, compromise and moderation required to maintain a viable organicist conservative position. Given that, as I previously analyzed, organicism is important for the maintenance of freedom, while reactionism is fundamentally incompatible with individual liberty, the triumph of reactionism over organicism on the right is going to have very adverse impacts on freedom. Therefore, I believe that, for the sake of defending freedom, we need to take a very firm stance against competitive outrage. Not only should we make sure we are not playing that game ourselves, I think we actually need to call it out whenever we see it, to prevent it from being normalized any further. And we need to keep raising awareness, to make more people aware that this is something that is happening, and is going to have a deleterious effect on freedom if it continues unchecked.

Why Trump Morphed into Dubya 2.0

When Donald Trump first ran for President a decade ago, many of those who were sympathetic to his campaign said one of their biggest reasons for supporting him was his opposition to the forever wars, which was refreshing, particularly for a Republican. This even included some libertarians, who argued that as long as Trump could put an end to the endless, needless wars, him being President would be worthwhile, regardless of other factors. I didn't buy that argument, because I didn't trust that Trump would be reliable and dedicated enough to see this difficult mission through. I believed that Trump was always for himself first, and I think subsequent events have proven my initial judgement correct. However, as much as I disliked Trump, I had to acknowledge that a more peaceful foreign policy might be an upside of having Trump in the White House, at least when compared to having someone like Jeb Bush or Marco Rubio.

Fast forward a decade, and it appears that Trump has essentially morphed into Dubya 2.0 on steroids, when it comes to foreign intervention. In just the first year of his

second term, he has bombed Iran and Venezuela, threatened American intervention in Colombia and Mexico, and repeatedly stated his intention to takeover Greenland, the risks of starting a major conflict with the EU notwithstanding. Judging by the past year alone, Trump has indeed become the GOAT of US interventionism, making even Dubya himself look like a peaceful dove by comparison. Putting Trump in the White House has not only not led to the end of the forever wars, it looks like it might even have started a whole new chapter of the forever wars.

Looking at the broader picture, it's not even just foreign policy where Trump has morphed into Dubya 2.0. For example, the infamous right-wing cancel culture has returned with a vengeance. During the reign of Bush-43, particularly around the time of the Iraq War, the right tried hard to cancel people who were outspoken about opposing Bush's agenda. However, in the 2010s, particularly around the 'peak woke' era, the right seized upon the widespread frustrations over left-wing cancel culture, and generally refrained from practicing cancellations themselves, if only to maintain credibility. They even claimed that the right and the left had swapped places, in terms of pro-censorship attitudes. Looking at the events of the past year alone, this has been proven incorrect. Right-wing cancel culture is

definitely alive and well, even if it now co-exists with a newer left-wing variant. It now appears that its hibernation in the 2010s was a temporary aberration. Moreover, right-wing cancel culture has become a top-down phenomenon, with Trump himself often leading the charge, from the cancellation of Jimmy Kimmel, to threatening to primary Republicans who vote against his agenda.

A related phenomenon is the return of the religious right. In recent years, particularly in the past year, many have noticed that the religious right, which dominated the Bush-43 era, then became relatively weak in the 2010s, is also back with full force. Once again, the right is using language and arguments steeped in a particular strand of Christianity that has long been associated with Republican Party politics, even as they continue to embrace the not-very-religious Trump as their leader. Trump himself, although probably unable to participate in discussions about religion at length, nevertheless tacitly approves this shift towards religiousness within his MAGA movement. While I'm all for religious freedom, my main concern with the revival of this kind of religious sentiment in politics is that the last time it appeared on the scene, it was used to justify Bush's wars, as well as his domestic authoritarianism, providing a respectable veneer to a very ugly politics. It already

looks like the religious right is ready to do the same for Trump, a generation later.

So why has all this happened? I think it is because Trump, at least in his current form, actually shares most of the same 'supporting structures' as Bush-43. By 'supporting structures', I mean the base in narrow terms, as in the voter base, but also the donors, the powerful factions and the people who run them, the media apparatus, the think tanks, and other supporting institutions including educational and religious institutions. You can think of it as 'the base', but in broader terms. Both parties have these things, and they together set much of the agenda for the party. This is why it is actually very difficult to turn a traditionally pro-war party into a pro-peace party. Contrary to claims by Don Jr. and others, the Republican Party has remade Trump, more than the other way around. This, again, is why siding with the right tribe and only trying to work within that tribe was never going to be an effective way to bring about an end to the forever wars. If anything, I think this should be the biggest lesson of the Trump era so far.

The biggest reason why Trump shares most of the same 'supporting structures' as Bush-43 had is because he has always been a leader who has preferred playing to the

base, rather than building bridges and actually disrupting the current state of political tribalism. While I acknowledge that it would be difficult for him to disrupt the tribalism even if he wanted to, the fact is that he didn't even try to. In fact, his words and actions, from calling Democrats and liberals all sorts of nasty names, to blaming almost every crisis on 'the left', have only made the tribalism worse. In politics, you can win elections by either taking over existing tribes, or creating your own support base that transcends pre-existing tribes. Trump has chosen the former because it is easier. The downside is that you eventually have to feed the desires of every group that makes up that tribe, because if you lose any major faction within the tribe, you lose your majority at best, and you may even break up the tribe irreversibly at worst. It now appears that Trump understands this, and is willing to do whatever it takes to keep his chosen tribe together, and more importantly, behind him. Even if it means continuing and escalating the forever wars.

During the 'peak woke' era, some anti-woke personalities, particularly those associated with Republican-aligned think tanks and media outlets, called on those of us who were frustrated with cancel culture and radical identity politics to simply switch to the right, claiming that only the right can defeat wokeness. They

were of course very dismissive of my preferred approach to wokeness, i.e. convincing moderate progressives and old-school liberals that postmodern critical theory is a heavily misguided worldview, and that progress and justice can only be delivered by sticking to the values and principles of old-school liberalism, including most importantly free speech. Over time, I think that the evidence has shown that my preferred approach is working quite well, with left-leaning people increasingly unlikely to embrace cancel culture nowadays, and with the Democrats and other center-left parties across the West generally disavowing woke identity politics nowadays. On the other hand, the revival of right-wing cancel culture proves that using the right-tribe to 'defeat wokeness' is ultimately self-defeating, because the right-tribe simply doesn't believe in free speech, at least when taken as a whole (i.e. there are people on the right who strongly believe in free speech, but collectively speaking, the right objectively isn't big on free speech).

Ultimately, I think all the pivotal events of the past decade have collectively demonstrated that peace and freedom cannot come about within the current framework of tribalist politics. Neither the right-tribe nor the left-tribe as a whole is truly interested in these things, and those who play to a tribe will only end up

getting captured by its agenda. Playing to political tribalism might be an easy shortcut for those who want to pursue elected political office in an expedient manner. However, this is certainly not a viable path for positive change. Instead, it would only serve to entrench existing unsound positions, and the vested interests behind them, within each tribe. This is why those who want to bring about peace and freedom must first be committed to transcending political tribalism, even if it is the more difficult path to take. Importantly, this doesn't only apply to those holding or running for elected political office. It also applies to journalists, activists, thinkers, and indeed anyone who is interested in making a change for the better.

We Need to Talk About What Conservatism Is

The events of recent years have got me thinking lately. The many ways the anti-woke movement went wrong, the way the IDW imploded, the way the political right has taken an authoritarian turn, the emergence of a 'National Conservatism' that is neither nationalist nor truly conservative but highly authoritarian, and so on. Why did all this happen? And what can we do to fix things from here?

Exploring the Conservative Tradition

The common element in the aforementioned cases appears to be the rise of a harshly authoritarian strain of thinking in the political right. Therefore, I think we need to examine the conservative philosophical tradition first. After all, it is what is supposed to underpin the political right. I think we should start with the ideas of 18th century British thinker Edmund Burke, because he is often considered the father of conservatism. Burke was actually a member of the Whigs, the main liberal party in Britain at the time. He was outspoken against the

British government's oppressive policies towards the American colonies, and the damage the East India Company was doing to India. He opposed slavery and supported Catholic emancipation, and took a leading role in arguing against unrestrained royal power. He even worried that democracy would lead to tyranny over unpopular minorities. All this earned him the respect of liberals both in his time and long after his death. As you can see, Burke cared about individual liberty and justice for everyone, including minorities. He was certainly no reactionary who opposed all change and wished to use government power to turn back the clock. His approach to the controversies of his day would hardly fit in with today's populist, culture war orientated part of the right. If Burke represents what real conservatism is, then Trumpism, 'National Conservatism' and the postliberal right are simply not conservative movements at all.

The reason Burke is revered by conservertaives is because he staunchly opposed the French Revolution, correctly predicting the chaos and authoritarianism that would follow. Burke's opposition to the French revolution actually took his fellow liberals by surprise, again proving that he was not a reactionary who predictably opposed all change. The reason he opposed the French Revolution was because he saw that the

radical upheaval, the total destruction of tradition, the focus on abstract ideas rather than practical reality, and the denial of the complexity of people and society, would eventually lead to tyranny. I think there are very real parallels between Burke's story, and today's classical liberals who are anti-woke. Like Burke, we started out being passionate about liberty, concerned about the overreach of government power (particularly during the 'War On Terror'), and advocated for the inclusion and equality of minorities against the conservative establishment. We did all this because we believed in individual liberty. However, in the 2010s, 'wokeism', more accurately known as cultural systemism, began to demand changes to society that were harmful to free speech and individual liberty, and we felt we had no choice but to take a stand against this development. Like Burke more than 200 years ago, we saw a revolution that was rooted in academic philosophy, ignored the complexities of reality, and was hellbent on deconstructing and banishing all traditional values, including even free speech itself. Like Burke, we predicted that it would not end well for liberty. If Burke's opposition to the French Revolution represents the core spirit of conservatism, then we anti-woke liberals are the very best expression of the conservative tradition in this day and age.

Of course, the conservative tradition is not limited to Burke. Let's look at another very well respected figure in that tradition, 19th century British Conservative Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. He is famous for saying that 'the great question is, not whether you should resist change which is inevitable, but whether that change should be carried out in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws, the traditions of the people, or in deference to abstract principles and arbitrary and general doctrines'. In other words, it is not change in general that is to be opposed, but that only change rooted in abstract philosophy and doctrines, removed from reality and alien to the traditions of the nation, that should be opposed. This is entirely consistent with the way Burke approached politics, even though Disraeli was speaking almost a century later. Clearly, Burke and Disraeli belonged to the same tradition.

In fact, this tradition of conservatism, as it should be properly understood, has never entirely died out. More recently, 11 years ago to be exact, then-British Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron famously stated that 'Conservatives believe in the ties that bind us; that society is stronger when we make vows to each other and support each other. So I don't support gay marriage despite being a Conservative. I support gay marriage because I'm a Conservative.' Cameron

supported gay marriage because it was an exercise in extending traditional values, and specifically traditional British values too. Being committed in a life-long relationship is a traditional value, and the role of legal marriage in securing that commitment has a long tradition in British law. The reform of gay marriage, while being a social change, is a change that is entirely consistent with British traditions, and not an alien imposition rooted in abstract philosophy. The logic of what change to accept here is again similar to what Burke and Disraeli represented. Again, today's anti-woke liberals are in strong agreement with this philosophy. It is why we are open to new ideas and supportive of reforms to make life better for everyone in general, but opposed to the kind of radical and theory-driven change that cultural systemism represents. This is why a strong case can be made that today's anti-woke liberals are the real heirs of the conservative tradition, properly understood.

The Origins of the Authoritarian Right

If today's anti-woke liberals are the real heirs of the conservative tradition, then today's authoritarian right necessarily represents a distortion or corruption of the conservative tradition. I believe an analysis of the

history of Western politics, particularly American politics, of the past several decades actually supports this view. In the mid-late 20th century, the US Republican Party gradually adopted a culture-war based politics, where reactionary sentiments to any and all change are encouraged and magnified, for the sake of electoral gains. A series of strategic moves laid the foundation for this transformation, including the 'southern strategy' that took advantage of post-desegregation reactionary sentiment, the making of abortion into a central culture war issue after Roe v. Wade was decided, the 'war on terror', and the aughts scare campaign around gay marriage. This meant that, by the aughts, Republican politics no longer represented conservatism as properly understood, but a populist reactionism that fundamentally opposes all social change, something very different to the Burke-Disraeli approach to politics. This reactionary version of conservatism also had some, but not total, influence in other Western countries.

In the aughts, reactionary conservatism was focused on preventing change that was yet to happen. Gay marriage was its first and foremost target. Yet, as history teaches us, change is inevitable, sound ideas will win out in the end, and reactionaries never successfully stop all change. So gay marriage became legal in almost all of

the West, despite aggressive resistance by the reactionary right. The reaction of the true conservative might have ranged from actually welcoming the change (like Cameron did), to reluctantly making peace with it, seeing that it is now what the people support, and predictions of negative effects on family values haven't come true either. But the reactionary cannot accept any change, and views it as a defeat. This is why the culture warriors on the right are now saying that gay marriage won because the right was not aggressive enough, and that they now need to wage the culture wars, especially on LGBT issues ever more aggressively.

The wish to use state power to wage the culture war aggressively has, by definition, turned reactionary conservatism into something that is completely alien to the conservative tradition, by turning its back on everything from the principle of limited government to the classical liberal values that Anglosphere conservatives going back to Burke held as a central pillar of their politics. The movement looks up not to English-speaking conservatives like Burke, Disraeli, Reagan and Cameron, but to right-wing figures in Eastern Europe like Viktor Orban. This politics hence represents an unwelcome import of authoritarian foreign norms into the Anglosphere to supplant our own liberal values and

traditions, something real conservatives should resist unconditionally.

Most concerningly, the tactics that the movement has adopted, including stoking populist negativity towards certain minority groups, obstructing the freedom of private businesses to do business as they see fit (including Disney, Bud Light and Target alike), not taking a stand against the fake news and biased reporting that is creating a post-truth political discourse and encouraging hateful sentiment, and continuing to stoke passions even as violent individuals and groups have threatened businesses and organizations in the name of fighting this culture war, have alarming parallels to the fascism of 1930s Europe. Given that conservatives should, by principle, oppose all fascistic behavior (as Winston Churchill famously demonstrated), the true conservative needs to stand against what the culture war right has become today. While I think that today's culture war right can't be called 'fascist' (they don't support a fascist economic system, nor do they appear to be antisemitic, for example), it is certainly not to be considered a form of conservatism, because true conservatives do not condone fascistic behavior.

What Needs to Happen

The first thing that needs to happen is the revival of the conservative tradition, as properly understood. As I have demonstrated, today's anti-woke liberals are the natural heirs of the conservative tradition, and we should unapologetically take it up. If we do not, we would be allowing the culture war right to pretend that they are conservative, which would serve to hide their radicalism from the general public. Taking up the conservative mantle would not harm our ability to identify as classical liberals, or argue for classical liberal positions. There is no conflict between conservatism and classical liberalism, in the context of the 21st century English-speaking West. Even going back to Burke's time, English-speaking conservatism clearly had a liberal character. After several more centuries of the classical liberal consensus, a conservative in our society would definitely have to be a classical liberal, trying hard to conserve this important part of our political tradition for future generations, against assaults from both the left and the right.

The lack of a healthy conservative tradition has also led to today's polarization, where many people feel like they have to choose from either wokeism or the increasingly authoritarian right, or else shut up about their views. The revival of the conservative tradition would go a long way to fix this problem. Bringing back a conservatism

that allows the possibility of gradualist progress would also provide an alternative to the kind of progressivism that is rooted in abstract, and hence unsound, cultural systemist theories.

We also need to call out, and ultimately aim to defeat, the authoritarian culture war right, for two reasons. Firstly, they are the reason why so many young people immediately react negatively when they hear 'conservative'. They are the reason why we classical liberals still fear embracing the c-word, even though it fits us very well. The image of conservatism has been tarred by several decades of reactionism, as well as the recent authoritarianism, and we need to work hard to rehabilitate its image. We can't do that without calling out the authoritarian culture war right. Secondly, some in the authoritarian culture war right are now resorting to fascistic behavior out of a desire to forcibly turn back the clock of society. Even though they are not actually fascists, embracing fascistic behavior should be unacceptable to conservatives, and we should make it clear. As Winston Churchill demonstrated, conservatism can only be credible if it takes the strongest stance against fascism. We too can take a credible stand for conservatism in today's world by firmly opposing the fascistic behavior that we are seeing from the authoritarian culture warriors right now.

IV. Why the Left isn't the Answer Either

Why the Far-Left's Model of Change is All Wrong

Recently, I have been talking a lot about promoting a 'progressive conservative' ideal. If you want to know more about what 'progressive conservatism' entails, you can start by reading my 'Progressive Conservative Manifesto'. One of the biggest reasons why I'm talking about progressive conservatism now is because, in the face of the Trump-led reactionary right's assaults on long-standing civil rights, programs and conventions that are too liberal for their liking, I have come to the view that we must take a stand for what we believe, before it's too late. My other, more long-standing reason for talking about progressive conservatism is because, over the years, I've found that the left's model of change is actually a massive failure. Like I've said many times, it leads to the needless polarization of society, and the burnout of generations of young people, and also opens the door to dangerous waves of backlash. Indeed, these two things are clearly linked in the present moment: it is the backlash to the 2010s 'woke left' that has allowed the reactionary right to gain power, to be in the position they are in right now, to do the damage they are doing

right now. My hope is that a program of progressive conservatism will solve both problems.

Before a progressive conservative program can actually move forward, it has to gain enough support. Some of the support is going to come from centrists, moderate libertarians, and genuine anti-woke liberals, all of whom were frustrated at the woke excesses of the 2010s, but even more worried about the reactionary right's authoritarian overreach under Trump. I count myself as firmly belonging to this category. However, we also need to pull people from the more progressive side of the political spectrum because, let's face it: right now, all the energy is with either those who identify as 'progressives', or the MAGA crowd, and any movement that can't accept MAGA-ism will have to find allies on the progressive side, if it is to grow. The reason why I am criticizing the left's model of change is because I want to convince progressives to come over to our side. I want to convince them to come over, because the far-left's model of change is flawed, and we have a better way to move forward, to achieve what they want. The rewards of having a better model of change will be, of course, in the form of actually successfully making things better, and also in the form of defeating the reactionary right.

I think the biggest problem with the far-left's model of change is that it wants to tear down the status quo entirely. This is counterproductive, because it is much harder to build something good from scratch. It also leads to massive backlash, because people don't like to see what they have always known get destroyed in the service of some arbitrary philosophical theory. What we should remember is that the backlash always falls most heavily on the disadvantaged minorities of society. This is why I actually believe that the continued pursuit of radical change using the far-left's model is actually immoral. Indeed, history doesn't contain a single example where this far-left model of change has successfully brought good outcomes, while it contains many cautionary tales as to the harms this flawed model could bring. That many progressives became sympathetic to this failed model in the past decade, despite its historical track record, was almost entirely because of the influence of postmodern critical theory, which itself is an objectively unsound worldview.

Rather than tearing everything down, I would argue that a better approach would be to make what we have better, by drawing on our long-standing values. Values like freedom, compassion, caring for each other, commitment to improving our understanding of the truth, meritocracy on a fair playing field, and so on, are

all embedded within our collective conscience, but their application to the real world remains incomplete. The progressive conservative project seeks to more fully implement these values in all areas of our life. It therefore seeks to strengthen, rather than deconstruct, our traditional inheritance. Through this process, we can certainly advance civil rights, make society more inclusive of minorities and fairer for everyone, and so on. This is especially true, if we can argue against the politics of the reactionary right, on the grounds of these traditional values. This should be easy to do, given that the reactionary right clearly does not care about harming real life people, and does not care about science or truth either.

I believe the flagrant violation of our long-standing values by the reactionary right under Trump gives us a good opportunity to argue for a better world based on upholding these values. But we can only successfully do that if we truly leave the nihilistic ideologies of deconstructionist postmodernism and oppressor vs. oppressed identitarian critical theory behind. I think the choice is clear, as to which path we should take going forward.

Why the Left is All Doomer Nowadays

There's no denying it: the left is in an absolutely doomer phase. Gone is the optimism for 'revolutionary change' that pervaded leftists spaces in the late 2010s. Breadtube has been largely dead for several years now. Cancel culture largely stopped being a problem by 2022, not because the left suddenly had a collective awakening about free speech, but because the activists who did the canceling largely stopped showing up. Everywhere on the internet, you hear people complaining about how bad the 2020s are, and it appears that many of those doing the complaining hold leftist views. The 'resistance' to the second Trump era has been a lot quieter, not because people are not as opposed to his actions, but because the loudest voices of the first 'resistance', the leftist protestors, are now sitting at home in despair. Many of the people saying how Vance is definitely winning in 2028 are also not MAGA people, but actually leftists! In fact, in left-wing circles, hope and optimism are very uncool at the moment. Doomerism is undoubtedly the overwhelming zeitgeist of the 2020s left.

So how did the left get here? Objectively speaking, if they were more optimistic in 2018 than right now, then subjective views must have been doing a lot of the heavy lifting. Both back then and right now, Trump was/is in the White House. Both back then and right now, the anti-SJW reaction / red pill / MAGA-adjacent culture, long seen as the mortal enemy of the left, was/is a significant player on the scene, enjoying a high level of popularity on almost every social media platform. Both back then and right now, the leftist agenda, especially on cultural issues, was/is largely unpopular with the general public, and widespread backlash to that agenda was already building back then. The fact is, we are objectively in a similar place right now compared to the late 2010s. If leftists are doomers today, then they should have been equally doomer back in the late 2010s. I think the only way to explain the discrepancy here is that the left was under the illusion that a magical breakthrough, a shortcut to utopia, was soon to come back in the late 2010s, because they were convinced so by their flawed theories. That the promised change hadn't come all these years later has finally killed all hope of it actually happening at all.

It isn't even like this is the first time the left's empty promises of an instant magical shortcut to utopia 'inspired' a generation to misguided forms of activism,

and eventually left them all burned out, after the promises of utopia didn't come true. A similar thing happened back in the 1960s to 70s, an era of radical cultural change, protests about almost everything, and general societal upheaval, with all that eventually resulting in the conservative backlash of the 1980s. If we don't learn the lessons of history, we are bound to repeat them again and again.

What the left doesn't understand is that there is simply no shortcut to utopia. Sound and sustainable improvement, especially in terms of cultural issues, can only come about as a result of gradual, step-by-step changes, taken in a cautious way, with every detail carefully considered before the change is implemented. It is long-term hard work, because it has to be. History has shown us that abruptly implemented cultural change, especially where the details are not carefully worked out in a consensus manner beforehand, almost always ends in disaster. The fact is, there is simply no shortcut to utopia, because there can't logically be, except in the philosophical sophistry of New Left postmodern critical theory. Every improvement needs to be well developed and well thought out. Consensus needs to be built by changing hearts and minds one by one, while the reform itself is refined by taking people's concerns into consideration at every step. Finally, the

reform needs to be implemented carefully, making sure that there aren't any unintended consequences that could lead to backlash. None of this hard work can be avoided, nor can the time frame be magically shortened, if we are to have a sustainable program of improving things for everyone.

Leftists loathe to hear people say that 'life is suffering'. Some chronically online leftists even seem to think that Jordan Peterson invented the phrase, when the Buddha was the one who first said it. But no matter who says it, 'life is suffering' is indeed the objective reality. Wars, discrimination, conflict and so on are undeniably constant objective realities of life. My philosophy is that improving the condition of humanity by reducing the amount of suffering, by reducing the frequency and burden of the aforementioned realities, is what gives our lives meaning. Our time on Earth might be relatively short, but if each of us can make a difference by moving things just a little towards less suffering, in a way that is sustainable and long-lasting, then our time on Earth would be worthwhile. Of course, we also need to make sure that we are not actually making things worse, and this is something the left all too often forgets. If we stay true to this philosophy, and thus place our hope in a sustainable program of gradual social improvement, we wouldn't be distracted by theories promising false hope

that can never come true, and we won't end up as burned out doomers.

My Case Against the Theory Left: A Basic Statement

1. The Abstract Philosophy Trap

In the previous decade, we saw the rise of a morally authoritarian brand of activism rooted in postmodern critical theories. This brand of activism attempted to push the largely popular and successful tradition of reformist liberalism aside, justified not by objective reality, but by their philosophical commitments only. This was a disaster both from the perspective of freedom itself, seen in the rise of cancel culture and its chilling effects on free speech and rational discussion of issues, as well as from the perspective of social justice, because it allowed the rise of a reactionary, and equally moral authoritarian, 'postliberal' right. Left-wing moral authoritarianism has led to right-wing moral authoritarianism, and the result is a double dose of unfreedom, as well as a lot of culture war tribalism.

The problem of trusting abstract ideas and philosophy to solve society's problems might be most clearly seen in the case of the forced application of postmodern critical theories, but this is actually a long-standing problem,

particularly in so-called progressive circles. The endless arguments about whether particular ideas are 'progressive', 'feminist', and so on are a reflection of the obsession with the abstract, and such arguments at least imply that some ideas should be taboo in progressive circles, which is a highly morally authoritarian position to take. It was against this situation that I began writing about moral libertarianism. Remember, this was the case even before postmodernism became mainstream. As I often say in reply to these debates, how about we just have more compassion for everyone?

2. When Theory is Slavery: Why the Theory Left is Regressive

As far back as 2018, I came up with the idea that 'theory is slavery', and I mentioned it in several episodes of my show around that time. However, I never really elaborated on why that is the case. Basically, the New Left of the West since around the 1970s has been very much a theory-based left. Several factors combined to cause this. The biggest was perhaps the fact that, around that time, a new faction of the Left broke away from the workers, to instead embrace intellectuals and academia, as a new revolutionary force. They were the

faction behind the upheavals of the 1960s, including most famously May 68 in France, which the old workers-Left actually did not support (at least initially, it became more complicated later on). Another was that, among the young radicals of that era, there was the idea that following the correct theory was the most important thing. After the splintering of the Left in the 1970s and 80s, this idea fell out of fashion, but elements of it are still present in the attitudes of the Left today.

Anyway, the key point is, much of the Western Left today takes a theory-based approach to everything, and base their so-called progressivism on achieving the goals of their theory. They decide what is a good course of action, or what counts as success, not based on objective reality, not based on if the lives of people have actually been made better, but on their theoretical concerns. This, I think, is essentially being a slave to theory. Hence theory has actually become slavery, in the context of the 21st century Western Left.

Besides being unable to improve people's lives, what I'm most concerned with the theory-Left is that it effectively discourages independent thinking, which I value very much as a Moral Libertarian. Through building a movement that is enslaved to a whole suite of critical theories, which explain every social issue and cultural

conflict with its particular philosophy, New Left activism actually creates a mass of people who think in lockstep on every issue, because they are informed by theory rather than their own observation of reality and their own independent thinking. In turn, this actually divides society into two sides, one side which thinks in lockstep with theory on every issue, and another side which comes together simply to fight what they correctly see as an illogical and contradictory coalition. I think this is a major reason behind the polarization we are seeing in the West today.

To avoid the pitfalls of the theory-based New Left, I believe the most important thing is to stay grounded in objective reality. Measure every idea and every course of action by their results in objective reality. If it has not really improved the lives of people, it is not progress at all. Another thing is, be ready to listen to unfamiliar ideas, and don't come to the table with obsessions and preconceptions rooted in ideological theories. This will prevent an objective understanding of anything. In short, to avoid being a slave to theory, always remain open-minded and objective.

3. How Critical Theory Impedes Progress & Innovation

I need to talk about one of the most controversial ideas found in all forms of postmodern critical theory generally: the view that certain values, ideas and forms of knowledge can be tied to a specific identity group. In critical race theory (CRT), we see this manifest as things like saying that traditional math education is 'white', liberalism is 'white', or the idea of meritocracy is inherently 'white'. In more extreme cases, even the objectivity that underpins science could be considered 'white'. I want to note here is that this form of thinking is certainly not limited to CRT. For example, many of the aforementioned things can be accused of being 'patriarchal' too, using the lens of some feminist critical theories.

Indeed, postmodernized critical theory has plenty of influences to make them think this way. These include the core critical theory view that all dominant ideas in society are there to serve the dominant (or oppressor) groups, and the Foucauldian postmodernist idea that all knowledge and discourse is primarily shaped by power dynamics. The contemporary Theory Left's habit of assigning cultural ideas to identity groups is not limited to the dominant groups either, as seen in theories about 'cultural appropriation', which generally apply to minority cultures. Obviously, the culture in question

must, in the first place, be defined as the property of an identity group, for these theories to work.

The main problem I have with this model of thinking is that it impedes the impartial discovery of objective truth. It also impedes the exchange of ideas between cultures, and ultimately the freedom of innovation that is required for social progress. In other words, what we have here is a model of thinking that essentially wants to throw out the best things about the Enlightenment, the very things that underpinned the great progress in science, technology and civil rights alike in the past two to three centuries. What I'm concerned about is that, many people don't quite fully grasp how important it is to defend these things.

What we need to be able to say is that, there is objective truth and knowledge, and it is a worthy endeavor to discover and learn it in the most robust way, regardless of race or other identity characteristics. A strong commitment to the objective truth, via the study of science, math and so on, cannot be tied to any race, because we're talking about the objective truth, and it is by definition valid for all. Good ideas, good music, good designs and so on can't be 'white' or 'black' or belong to any other race either, because the power of innovation belongs to the whole of humanity, and

shouldn't be limited by the boundaries of identity. I believe that, if we fail to defend these fundamental truths, we will have failed the future of humanity.

4. How the Theory Left Drove People to the Reactionary Right

How did the political landscape of the West come to be polarized between a theory-obsessed Left and a reactionary Right? Having read plenty of political history, and having reflected on the topic for some time, I have come to the conclusion that it all began in the late 1960s, when a faction of the Left turned away from the workers and towards intellectuals for their support. This became the critical theory-based New Left, which presented endless theory-based critiques of the existing society. Over time, the cultural changes arising from this theory-based Left led to a cascade of social effects, which steadily drove a substantial number of people towards hardline reactionary conservatism. This process might even have accelerated in recent years, with a new wave of the Theory Left having come and gone in the past decade. The result is, there is now a lot of resistance to social justice reforms of all kinds.

The problem with the Theory Left is that they are rooted in theoretical philosophy, rather than the practical facts of the real world. This means they produce the wrong diagnoses of social problems, and provide the wrong solutions. Most problematically, they also have a strong bias against long-standing social institutions like marriage, family and other pillars of traditional communities, due to the critical theory worldview seeing them as upholding an 'oppressive' system. A major effect of Theory Left's ideas and practices, especially their attempts to deconstruct and 'liberate' everything, is that they have served to weaken the social fabric significantly over the past five decades. This, in turn, has deprived what many people need most, strong and stable family-based support networks, and a strong sense of community, as well as the sense of security this provides. These people are naturally going to be attracted to reactionary conservatism, which promises to stem the decline, and restore society to its former state. Even though in practice they have not been successful in doing this, the very promise, the very idea, has been attractive for many people, who have nowhere else to turn.

In the past decade, there was another wave of Theory Left activism that drove even more people to the Right in another way, through their unreasonable insistence

that their ideas be accepted without debate. This attitude is rooted in the theory that knowledge and discourse is rooted in power and oppression, which totally goes against both practical common sense and the ideals of the Enlightenment. But more importantly, this attitude just isn't going to be acceptable to most people. During the past decade, I have read many stories about formerly moderately progressive people being turned to the hard Right after they encountered the unreasonable attitude of the Theory Left. Some like to deny this reality, but I believe it's something that actually happened to a significant extent.

So how can we begin to heal this mess, so we can get reformist progress back on the agenda? We need to put an end to the dominant influence of the Theory Left on our politics. Particularly, as long as the critical theory Left's zero-sum, deconstructive, essentially anti-society worldview even so much as lingers in our conscience, we can't really start to rebuild a strong social fabric. Without a stronger and healthier social fabric, there really isn't going to be the will to take on the reforms that are required to solve our problems. And so, every new issue and every new development just turn into more fuel for the culture wars, which just goes to benefit both the Theory Left and the reactionary Right, thus continuing the vicious cycle. There's no room, no

appetite, to actually take an unbiased look at things like automation, racial equality, civil rights, the climate and so on. Hence, going forward, I will talk even more about how we can remove the influence of five decades of critical theory in our thoughts and our culture. This is something we need to work together on, because it has affected almost all of us, to differing degrees.

The other important thing to do would be to bring back those who have already fallen into reactionary hardline conservatism, because they see that as the only way to bring back a healthy society. We have to build a better alternative: a way back to a healthy society, but one that is forward looking rather than backward looking. And then we need to convince these people that our way will work, and we can fix the mess created by the Theory Left in a way that the reactionary ideology simply can't. Where reactionary ideology can only keep people nostalgic about a better past, we can give them something to actually hope for: an even better future. It is a long road ahead, so I think we should start getting to work as soon as possible.

How the New Left Mixed Up Freudian Repression and Political Oppression

Here is a topic that is very important, but has been generally overlooked: the conflation of Freudian repression with oppression in a social justice sense in the Theory Left, and what effects this has had on the social and political landscape.

Let's start by revisiting that infamous 1965 essay Repressive Tolerance by Herbert Marcuse. In the past few years, a lot has been said about the anti-free speech implications of that essay. Its premise has been simplified by some, to be simply about withdrawing tolerance to hateful ideas so that oppression can be prevented. As if we were simply talking about a more militant version of Karl Popper's Paradox of Tolerance. However, I believe that is an oversimplified view of things. Indeed, if it were about preventing intolerance and oppression, if Marcuse's concern was about free speech leading to oppression of minorities, why would the essay be titled 'repressive tolerance' and not 'oppressive tolerance'?

How Marcuse Conflated Two Kinds of 'Liberation'

To put it simply, 'repression' and 'oppression' refer to different things. Marcuse was clearly aware of this, given that both terms were used in the essay. To understand what Marcuse meant by repression, I think we need to look at the broader context of Marcuse's work. Much has been said about Marcuse's roots in Marx, but I think Marcuse's worldview, and hence the Western Theory Left in general, owes even more to a particular interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis. Those familiar with Marcuse's work would know that when he used 'repression', he meant it in the Freudian psychoanalytic sense. Hence, given the title of the essay was 'repressive tolerance' and not 'oppressive tolerance', his main complaint against the free market of ideas was that 'repressive' cultural values could prevail. Of course, there also appears to be a conflation of 'repression' and 'oppression' throughout this work and some of his other works, so sometimes his works have been used to justify withdrawing tolerance from oppressive ideas. But it is clear that he is rather more concerned about 'repression' than 'oppression'. Indeed, those familiar with Marcuse's 1955 book Eros and Civilization would know that Marcuse disagreed with

Freud that repression is inevitable in civilization, as he devoted an entire book to his counter argument that society could be reorganized so as to minimize the need for 'repression', which he thought was the key to making human beings happier. This provides further evidence that Marcuse was actually primary concerned with liberation from Freudian repression, rather than ending oppression in the social justice sense.

The more important thing is that, the influence of the Marcusean worldview, which was indeed very influential among the student activists of the late 1960s and the 1970s, means that in much of the Theory Left's theory, oppression, as in the social injustice sense, and repression, as in the Freudian sense, are often conflated. This, in turn, is related to the fact that Marcusean 'liberation' is very different from our conventional understanding of liberation, in that it is ultimately about removing Freudian repression, rather than simply removing social injustice. To a large extent, many on the Theory Left appear to even be no longer consciously aware of the difference. However, social oppression and Freudian repression are two very distinct concepts. To get to the bottom of all this, and to understand one of the core problems of the Theory Left, I think we need to end this conflation once and for all.

Is 'Repression' Always Bad?

I think we should start with what 'repression' means. The problem with Freudian psychoanalysis is that it was from a time before psychology became empirical and scientific. Therefore, like all Freudian terms, the concept of 'repression' is likely to be a mixture of different phenomenon, some good, some bad, and some perhaps confused. Therefore, to oppose 'repression' as a whole, as Marcuse (but not Freud) did, could risk throwing out some essential things about our civilization, throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as the saying goes. In the most basic sense, 'repression' simply refers to the restraint of our primal, animalistic desires for the sake of maintaining civilization. Freud actually thought this was an inevitable part of civilization, but Marcuse disagreed. Marcuse believed that society could be reorganized so as to minimize the need for 'repression', which would be the key to making human beings happier. Now, there is of course no empirical evidence, or even logical argument, that Marcuse's ultra-utopian vision would work. Indeed, Freud thought that freeing human beings from all 'repression' would lead to civilization collapsing. And I think common sense, as well as the implications of

what we know about human biology today, would be on the side of Freud rather than Marcuse.

Anyway, what is clear is that Freudian repression is an entirely different thing than oppression in the social justice sense. Racism is, by definition, oppressive, but it can't really be said to be repressive. On the other hand, to enter into a commitment of lifelong monogamy, as in marriage, is clearly not oppressive in the social justice sense, because it is a voluntary choice made by individuals. However, it could indeed be said to be repressive, because it does include a promise to restrain from certain primal instincts in the future, for the sake of building a relationship and a family together. Hence, what is oppressive may not be repressive, and vice versa. And more importantly, while oppression is always bad, some forms of repression can be good and necessary, and even make us happy! After all, the joy of being a human being is that we live in a civilization, and we are not at the mercy of our primal instincts all the time. I think this is something that Marcuse failed to appreciate enough.

A Dystopian World Without Emotional Restraint

The conflation of liberation from oppression with liberation from Freudian repression in the work of Marcuse and others have had a long standing effect on the Theory Left, with the effect of wrongly assuming whatever is 'repressive', that is whatever requires emotional restraint, to be oppressive. However, this view is not only wrong, it is actually harmful to the cause of social justice. While unfairly distributed demands of emotional restraint may be part of a picture of social injustice, it is clear that not all demands of emotional restraint are incompatible with social justice. Where emotional restraint is fairly and proportionally expected of each individual, it can be the essential ingredient in many civilizing pillars of the social fabric, like the example of marriage previously illustrated. As I argued elsewhere, I believe the Theory Left's erosion of civilizational foundations, at least partly inspired by the Marcusean ideal of abolishing Freudian repression, has led to a breakdown in the social fabric, causing a rise in reactionary ‘conservatism’ and resistance towards various social reforms. Therefore, I believe that the misguided aim to abolish 'repression' has indeed harmed the actually important aim to end oppression.

Furthermore, an important part of a healthy and vibrant liberal democracy is the concept of a social contract. Indeed, it is sometimes argued that every society needs

a strong social contract. But in liberal democracies, where ideas are freely debated, and the people choose their governments and their policies, having a strong social contract is especially important. And part of having a strong social contract is emotional restraint on the part of citizens. We all need to participate in the agreed process, in a rational and decent manner, for the democratic process to work. This is why it is not oppression or 'tone policing' to encourage people to present their concerns in a rational and polite manner. Rather, it is the key to achieving effective consensus and reform. The dominance of anti-restraint thinking has led to this point being forgotten all too often.

The effects of anti-restraint thinking are not limited to the Left either. A libertarianism without emotional restraint ceases to be an intellectual libertarianism, and rather becomes vulgar libertarianism, in the style of 'I should be able to do whatever I want, whenever I want'. Among conservatives, the loosening of emotional restraint has led to the unleashing of reactionary rage towards all unfamiliar and uncomfortable phenomenon, a change that has effectively turned much of conservatism into kneejerk reactionarism. As you can see, the Marcuse-inspired encouragement of liberation from emotional restraint in the past few decades has had really unhealthy effects on the political culture,

across the political spectrum. We should start recognizing this, so we can turn the ship around before it's too late.

Is This the Real Reason for Cancel Culture?

Next, I will examine the association between Marcuse's worldview and the practice of cancel culture today, and why those in favor of cancelling people in the name of social justice are ultimately confused about what they are actually doing.

While Repressive Tolerance was written in 1965, and many of today's pro-cancellation activists might not even have read it, it remains a historical fact that Marcuse was the most important thinker in the 1960s-70s student movements, and the spirit of his work has been carried on in various forms by this generation. Hence, a college student today could be influenced by the Marcusean worldview through various means, even if they had never read the original source of the ideas. This is why many people have pointed to Repressive Tolerance as the ultimate source of the ideas behind cancel culture.

Why It's 'Repressive Tolerance', not 'Oppressive Tolerance'

Let's first return to my point that the essay is titled 'repressive tolerance', rather than 'oppressive tolerance', which reflected Marcuse's primary aim being liberation from Freudian repression, rather than social oppression. In other words, Marcuse was skeptical about the free market of ideas, not just because oppressive ideas could win support, but more importantly, 'repressive' ideas could win support. It is clear that, for Marcuse, even if oppressive ideas are guaranteed to lose in the free market of ideas, if 'repressive' ideas could still win sometimes, he still wouldn't be happy about it. Hence, his primary motivation was one of preventing the popularization of 'repressive' ideas, rather than just oppressive ideas, through free speech and free debate.

If we look at things from this angle, the justification behind Repressive Tolerance suddenly begins to make sense. Oppressive ideas have generally not done well in the free market of ideas. Even if they temporarily gain an audience, in the longer run, oppressive and unjust ideas have always been defeated, in the free market of ideas. Rational debate has always favored the side of justice in the end, as most recently seen in the gay

marriage debate, where support grew from less than 20% to more than 60% in less than a generation. The success of gay marriage follows on from the success of civil rights, the idea of racial equality, the idea of gender equality, and so on. The free market of ideas has delivered in spades for social justice, and there is no reason why this winning streak wouldn't continue.

However, the story is different when it comes to so-called 'repressive' ideas. For example, gay marriage can actually be argued to be a 'repressive' idea, even though it is in line with social justice. What makes marriage equality a 'social justice' cause is that it provides a fair deal to both gay and straight people alike. However, the deal, the marriage contract, is one that inherently involves a lot of restraint, as discussed previously. Hence, from a Marcusean viewpoint, the victory of marriage equality, over more radical ideas like the complete abolition of marriage, actually justified the skepticism towards free speech in Repressive Tolerance. As you can see, while the logic in Repressive Tolerance doesn't make sense if you are coming from a purely social justice angle, it does make sense when your primary aim is to abolish all forms of Freudian repression, which was where Marcuse was actually coming from.

The Reason Why 'Liberation from Repression' is Justifiably Unpopular

The reason why so-called 'repressive' ideas may win in the free market of ideas is because they have inherent value. Indeed, the example of marriage shows us that restraint of our primal instincts comes with its rewards. Restraint can make us happy, secure and fulfilled. Just as importantly, restraint is the foundation of many pillars of the social fabric. A politics built around liberation from nearly all restraint would mean the decimation of the social fabric, and is something that is going to be logically rejected by the majority of people. Hence, the fact that ideas Marcuse considered 'repressive' often win in the free market of ideas is not a sign that free speech and democracy aren't working. Rather, it's a sign that they are!

Furthermore, as I argued previously, a robust social contract is required for a healthy liberal democracy, and this can only happen with a good dose of emotional restraint from all citizens. Moreover, the process of debate, and indeed the process of democracy itself, is often about negotiating adjustments to the social contract. The level of restraint required in different areas of life is an important part of this. A politics built

around a general rejection of restraint would thus refuse to recognize the validity of many important aspects of a healthy politics. As a Moral Libertarian, my ideal for society is for everyone to be equally able to live by their moral values, and demonstrate by example the validity of the model of morality they live by. Again, morality is inherently about restraint, and any model of politics that rests on morality would also be deemed invalid by a politics built around refusal to recognize the necessity of restraint. By extension, since a politics devoid of restraint is morally empty, there is also no possibility of real social justice of any kind. The overall conclusion from all this is, the Marcusean ideal of liberation from Freudian 'repression' is necessarily incompatible with a healthy and morally driven politics.

In conclusion, there really is no reason to practice cancel culture, the set of practices informed by the logic of Repressive Tolerance, for social justice reasons. Free speech and rational debate has a strong track record in delivering victories for social justice. Rather, the Theory Left has been under the influence of the Marcusean conflation of Freudian repression with social oppression for so long that they are basically unconsciously serving a completely different goal, that is, the abolishment of the civilized restraint of our primal instincts. Such a goal can only be achieved by abolishing free speech, because

most rational people wouldn't support it. It is also a goal not worthy of supporting, or even serious consideration, because it will basically destroy civilization as we know it.

There is No Justice Without Free Speech

Around 4 or 5 years ago, I became increasingly frustrated at how 'the left' was changing. There was a rapid increase in identity politics and a pro-conflict, us-vs-them orientation, and there was a rapid drop in respect for liberal norms like free speech, freedom of conscience and so on. There was also increasing hostility between those who considered themselves 'left', and those who considered themselves 'libertarian'. These things meant that, overall, the Left now felt like a collectivist, group over individual, zero-sum political faction, that was also driven by theoretical concerns rather than practical needs.

To put it simply, a faction within the far-left is essentially promoting a version of justice that doesn't include, and doesn't depend on, respect for free speech. Now, this vision of 'justice without freedom' is indeed very different from what we're used to: traditionally, social justice started with being aware of the reality of disadvantaged lives, and we hear about that reality through free speech and the marketplace of ideas. We listen, and we gain an understanding that there are

things that need to be fixed. Thus free speech was the first and foremost necessary condition for social justice. Moreover, sometimes there are competing demands from different stakeholders in society, and we need to listen to all of them to come up with a solution that respects the needs of everyone. Again, free speech is important for this process. This is why, at least traditionally, we could say that there can't be social justice without free speech.

On the other hand, what we're seeing from the postmodern left is a new version of justice that is derived, not from listening to real life voices out there, but from philosophical theory. In this worldview, justice is simply what the theory demands, and it is going to be imposed on everyone, whether they like it or not. Speech is allowed only if it is not considered oppressive or repressive under their philosophical theory, in line with the spirit of Marcuse's Repressive Tolerance. The drive to bring about theoretical justice, including through the suppression of free speech if necessary, has led to widespread chaos, frustration and misunderstanding, which in turn has fueled the growth of scarily authoritarian reactionary movements, but they don't seem to care. These people seem to believe that the realization of the goals of their philosophical theory would bring about utopia. This allows them to disregard

the negative effects their actions are having in the here and now. In other words, to bring about theoretical justice, they are willing to throw practical justice under the bus.

This is why, if you are for practical justice, you need to take a stand against theoretical justice. The two don't seem to be compatible at all! Next time, if someone says that something is required for social justice, make sure to think about whether they are talking about practical justice or theoretical justice. A good test would be, does this improve things in the real world? And finally, remember that real justice always requires the existence of free speech. A philosophy that promises justice while suppressing free speech on a large scale is not to be trusted.

Why I Disagree with the Left's Rebellion for the Sake of Rebellion

Having studied, analyzed and talked about the ideology and philosophical theories of the contemporary Western (far-)left so much for several years, I can't help but notice something: all of it can basically be summarized as one big justification for rebellion. Specifically, unconditional, unlimited rebellion, i.e. not limiting rebellion to situations where there is actually well-grounded justification, and not limiting the scope of rebellion to only when and where it is well justified. The point here is, all movements for change 'rebel' against the status quo to some extent. The rebellious spirit definitely has its place in bringing about positive change, and also in resisting tyranny. Abolitionism rebelled against the then-status quo of slavery, women's suffrage and first wave feminism rebelled against the then-well accepted idea that men are superior and deserve more rights, and so on. These movements all rebelled against specific pre-existing ideas, institutions and/or laws that were rationally found to be unjustified. On the other hand, the contemporary Western far-left's vision doesn't accept limiting the rebellious spirit in this way. Their

philosophical theories tend to justify a far wider-ranging, all-encompassing type of rebellion. The kind of rebellion that could result in the indiscriminate tearing down of existing and long-standing values and institutions, regardless of merit.

In the past few years, I have generally labelled the contemporary far-left's postmodern critical theory ideology as 'critical anarchism'. I believe it is a form of anarchism because its end result is the tearing down of all existing values and institutions. It is a 'critical' anarchism because it seeks to achieve its end via the critical theory method of endlessly critiquing and deconstructing, as well as turning deconstructive critique into activism that aims to actually deconstruct things in the real world. I still believe this is a valid way of looking at the phenomenon, one that emphasizes the results. However, looking at it from a more psychological viewpoint, one can also see it all as basically an open-ended and unlimited justification for rebellion. I think one can look at this from two angles actually: firstly, if critical anarchism is to be the goal, then open-ended and unlimited rebellion would be well justified. If everything is an oppressive social construct, then rebelling against and destructing everything in the status quo is not only justified, but even heroic. Herbert Marcuse's call for the 'Great Refusal' in the 1960s, his

conflation of Freudian repression with political oppression and implicit calls to see them as one and the same and to abolish both simultaneously, Michel Foucault's perception of power being everywhere and resistance being applicable everywhere, and the activist left's decrying of calls for civility as 'tone policing', are all basically open-ended justifications for unrestrained rebellion. On the other hand, if one is already psychologically predisposed to favor unrestrained rebellion, then critical anarchist philosophies would provide the justification one needs to act on one's impulses. This is why those with this kind of ultra-rebellious predisposition would naturally feel that critical anarchist philosophies are 'liberating'. The kind of liberation they bring is to the ultra-rebellious mind, to free it from any and all constraint. It might not even actually have anything to do at all with liberation of people in the real world from social and political oppression.

This open-ended and unrestricted spirit of rebellion is actually one of the things that makes the contemporary Western activist left incompatible with traditional liberalism. Remember that old-school liberals only challenge aspects of the status quo that they find unjust, irrational, or otherwise unsound, after rational thinking and deliberation. The old-school liberal never

engages in open-ended and unrestricted rebellion, both because this would not generally be a rational and justified course of action to take, and because this indiscriminate attack on everything, whether justified or not, would detract from their well-justified criticisms of the things they most want to change. (This follows the logic that, to the average observer, if someone keeps complaining about everything, then they might themselves be the problem after all, and their complaints should probably be taken less seriously.) In conclusion, open-ended and unrestricted rebellion would be seen by the old-school liberal as both irrational and counterproductive.

Using real world examples, one can see that the old-school liberal is generally correct here. Think about this: if gay marriage activists opposed not only laws limiting marriage to one man and one woman, but also indiscriminately attacked the fact that marriage is between two people, or perhaps even the institution of marriage itself, or even the very concept of family itself, they would have undercut their case for rational reform severely, to the extent that gay marriage might not even have been legalized at all! Luckily, gay marriage activists, being mostly old-school liberals, limited their opposition to the then-status quo to only where it was rationally justified, and did not wage an open-ended and

unrestrained rebellion against all things to do with marriage and family. This is why gay marriage gradually gained public acceptance and support. When faced with arguments like these, the ultra-rebellious far-left really has no rational comeback available to them. If they don't want to give up their belief in open-ended and unrestricted rebellion, they would have to resort to irrational ideas. This is actually one explanation for why critical anarchist ideology was developed and propagated, despite being logically invalid and also not supported by any historical empirical evidence. For the ultra-rebellious far-left, critical anarchist ideology is not taken up because of its rational validity or its track record of success. It is taken up to provide justification for continuing an otherwise unjustifiable open-ended and unrestrained rebellion. Its value is therefore not in actually improving things in the real world, but in giving the rebellious-minded a (false) leg to stand on.

The far-left might want to believe they can actually deconstruct every criticism of their great rebellion away. After all, in their own world, they have already deconstructed the concepts of 'right vs wrong' and 'good vs bad' out of existence. However, most people in the real world still believe in 'right vs wrong' and 'good vs bad', and the far-left can't change that. And using the judgement of common sense and/or empirical

observation, unrestrained rebellion can easily be judged as ‘wrong’ and ‘bad’, if only based on the results they bring. I will leave arguments about harms to the social fabric and family values etc. to the side for now, and focus just on the impacts on social justice. The far-left like to say that their program is good for social justice, but empirical evidence from the past century shows otherwise, in that the far-left’s activism has only served to confuse the public and create frustration and backlash that the reactionary right can take advantage of, ultimately to the harm of the people that such activism was supposed to help. This has been true of the 1920s-30s left in Europe (which helped the rise of fascism), the 1960s-70s ‘New Left’ (which helped usher in some very reactionary politics in the 1980s), and the 2010s ‘woke left’ (responsible for the rise of Trump and the ‘populist’ right) alike. Thus, even just by their own stated goals, the far-left’s program has delivered one big failure after another, with no real successes to point to at all! In fact, their own track record proves the aforementioned point that the old-school liberals’ selective criticism and opposition to the status quo is much more effective than the far-left’s open-ended, unrestrained rebellion against the status quo. This, in turn, demonstrates the point that critical anarchist philosophy is ultimately much more effective at being a

psychological justification for unrestrained rebellion, than at bringing about effective positive change in the real world, and that it has been successfully propagated (up until now) mostly because of its psychological utility for the ultra-rebellious.

A major problem we face is that, although the far-left's critical anarchist program has actually been counterproductive for social justice, it retains plenty of influence in progressive and intellectual circles. I will have more to say about this, and how to fix it, in a future article. But my point here is that we need to recognize this influence, and attempt to remove and/or counteract it as much as possible, given what is at stake, especially in our current time of rising right-wing reaction.

Why the Left has a Problem with 'Culturally Normal'

Recently, California Governor and likely 2028 candidate Gavin Newsom called on the Democratic Party to be 'more culturally normal'. This has sparked controversy in some corners of the left. Some of them are saying that calls for the Democrats to be 'more culturally normal' are a dog whistle to move the party to the right, and throw some vulnerable minorities under the bus in the process. The comments have also been predictably linked to Newsom's previous statements opposing trans women participating in women's sports (as if that is the most important trans issue of our time, frankly I'm tired of this issue taking up all the oxygen).

However, does being 'more culturally normal' necessarily mean a wholesale shift to the right, and/or throwing minorities under the bus? This, I think, is what we need to examine here. I personally have been calling for everyone to embrace the politics of 'normies' again, saying that 'for the normie, the flavors of politics range from the regular liberal to the regular conservative, and anything else would just be seen as wacky or even dangerous'. In another article, I specifically called out

the contemporary ‘populist’ and MAGA right for being anti-normie reactionary radicals. Therefore, to embrace normie politics, which is necessary to become ‘more culturally normal’, certainly does not involve becoming more like the Trumpified right, or moving closer to their positions at all. It would instead look more like moving back to 2012, the year when President Obama publicly supported gay marriage. That’s certainly not a right-wing year, by the way.

Nor does being ‘more culturally normal’ necessarily mean throwing minorities under the bus. The LGBT community was certainly more ‘culturally normal’ during its campaign for gay marriage in the 2000s and the 2010s, compared with the so-called ‘gay liberation’ era of the 1970s. The weirdness of the 1970s queer culture turned the mainstream off, paving the way for the religious right of the 1980s to attack the community during the AIDS crisis. In contrast, the ‘more culturally normal’ approach of the 2000s and 2010s won public sympathy for the cause of equal rights, resulting in the legalization of gay marriage in almost every Western country by 2020. This, I think, is a very good example of being culturally normal actually also being good for advancing the civil rights of minorities.

The current controversy over calls to be ‘more culturally normal’ is actually reminiscent of the controversy over ‘family values’, back when I was in college in the 2000s. Back then, the right used to use ‘family values’ as a dogwhistle to signal their uncompromising opposition to gay marriage, and to what they perceived as the ‘gay agenda’ more generally (that phrase was used much like how ‘gender ideology’ is used nowadays). I was, of course, a strong opponent of this kind of politics. But that didn’t make ‘family values’ itself a bad thing. Nevertheless, many in the aughts left seemed to actually take issue with ‘family values’ itself, rather than just the dog whistling. While books like Don’t Think of an Elephant! by George Lakoff kickstarted a dialogue about how Democrats should frame their own ‘family values’, many in the left seemed to be uncomfortable with the whole angle about needing to embrace family values in the first place. Also during that era, several provinces in Canada wanted to introduce a new public holiday in February called ‘family day’, intended to let people spend more time with their families. Meanwhile, in Australia, the Labor party ran on a platform for ‘working families’ (and won the November 2007 election). I remember that both these moves were met with expressions of discomfort and disapproval from some parts of the left. Later on, during the ‘peak woke’

era of the late 2010s, some leftist authors and writers became more open about their disdain of 'family values', largely rooted in identitarian critical theory and so-called 'anti-capitalist' philosophy (that has nothing whatsoever to do with working class lives). This happened even as gay marriage had become legalized in almost all of the Western world, and hence the use of 'family values' as a dog whistle against gay marriage had become entirely historical by that point. This, I think, explains the left-wing resistance to embracing family values back in the aughts, even if the version of 'family values' on offer wasn't anti-gay, and even if it would help Democrats and their counterparts across the West win elections. The critical anarchist left simply doesn't like family values (or most things that normies like), period.

The cultural left's aversion to family values and normie values in general has also been on full display in the recent discourse regarding Taylor Swift. We all know that Swift has criticized Trump on multiple occasions, declared her support of the LGBT community, and endorsed both Joe Biden in 2020 and Kamala Harris in 2024. Yet, it appears that the rumors about her being secretly right-wing have returned. Why? It's because she's engaged to an NFL player, wants marriage and kids, has supposedly pro-MAGA friends, and sings that

she likes her friends canceled in her latest album. Guess what? If you think this is what right-wing is, then you're certainly going to consider me right-wing, but then you're also going to consider more than 90% of the population of the world right-wing. It's literally called 'seeing everything as right-wing because you're so far-left'. And this is how you actually let the right-wing win power for real.

Although there is plenty of evidence (like the gay marriage example above) supporting the idea that embracing a normie politics is better for advancing and defending the civil rights of vulnerable minorities, certain parts of the left just won't acknowledge this. It seems that they have an inherent aversion to normie politics, that is rooted not in empirical results from history, but in ideological commitments to empirically unsound philosophy. It turns out that, when you believe that the status quo is made up of invisible interlocking 'systems of oppression', this hinders an objective assessment of how things actually are, and prevents constructive action to try and improve things for real people living in the real world. This, again, is why I'm so passionate about critiquing and exposing the 'theory left', in the hope that people will return to their senses and work with the real world as it exists, to achieve practical progress that actually benefits people, for real.

The Problem with Deconstruction

The illiberal left is obsessed with deconstruction. For the illiberal left, every part of the status quo, every structure and every institution, is a product of oppressive power relations, and needs to be deconstructed to bring about liberation. The illiberal left is illiberal because they believe the freedoms guaranteed by liberalism are part of the oppressive structure to maintain the status quo, to prevent the dismantling of the status quo. I believe this view is illustrated most clearly in Herbert Marcuse's infamous essay Repressive Tolerance, where he essentially says that liberalism's universal tolerance leads to the upholding of the repressive and oppressive status quo, and that a truly liberating tolerance must be selectively intolerant to some ideas, i.e. illiberal at least some of the time. Hence, the basic logic of the illiberal left looks like this: the freedoms guaranteed by liberalism make the liberated utopia they desire impossible to achieve, so they must be knocked down.

Think about this: despite saying that it is for liberation, the ideology of deconstructionism actually doesn't even allow you the freedom to reject having your culture deconstructed! Once you say you want to keep your

culture, or at least that there are some aspects of the status quo you want to keep, then you become a supporter of oppression and repression. Thus, while deconstructionism is supposed to be liberating, it is 'liberating' on its own terms, not your terms, nor the terms of any individual. Therefore, for those of us who see things from the individual freedom point of view, deconstructionism is not only not going to be liberating at all, it is going to be highly prescriptive, highly authoritarian, and yes, highly oppressive in practice. This is seen in the fact that the most ardent supporters of the deconstructionist agenda often don't respect basic free speech norms at all.

And then there is the problem of the objective truth. Objectively speaking, scientifically speaking, not everything is a social construct, and therefore not everything can be deconstructed. But for the most ardent supporters of deconstruction, just saying this out loud would be a rejection of deconstruction, and therefore in support of oppression and repression. Hence, at least when taken to the extreme, deconstructionism is basically anti-science! It seems clear to me that, when deconstruction comes into conflict with science, it is science that needs to give way. This, I think, can be seen in how, in the trans community, those who voice support for the traditional clinical

medicine-based model of gender dysphoria, are often smeared as 'transmedicalist'. Another example is how, when discussing climate change, deconstructionists often want to focus on cultural phenomenon rather than the science itself. In both cases, they don't seem to be too interested in the actual science, or the objective truth.

Finally, I have this ongoing suspicion that deconstructionists want no less than 'liberation' from the objective truth. Which is to say, deconstructionism is simply a philosophically sophisticated way for some people to avoid the reality, by treating it as if it were not real. The ultimate intellectual form of escapism, one might say. The trouble is, many of us want to continue living in the real world. We don't need, or want, this kind of 'liberation' from reality.

We Need to be Reasonable About Tradition

A major problem with some recent social justice demands is that they are antagonistic to long-standing social norms, even where they don't need to be. There is sometimes a deliberate attempt to challenge, invalidate, or otherwise subvert many social norms, even where it doesn't clearly lead to more social justice. I think this is due to the heavy influence from radical academic theories like social constructionism, deconstructionism, and postmodernism more generally. I believe this approach is fundamentally misguided. It is based too much on abstract philosophy, and not on real world practicality. In the real world, social norms are an important part of social life. Using a functionalist sociological lens, we can often see that they fulfill important social functions, particularly around integration and pattern maintenance. Without these norms, social cohesion could fall apart. Hence, most people value social norms, and will defend them from unjustified attacks.

I'm not saying that social norms don't need to be changed or updated from time to time. What I'm saying

is that, this must be a careful and well justified process. The mass deconstruction of social norms leads to potential instability, and would naturally be met with backlash. Instead, I suggest a much less invasive approach: only the social norms that actually adversely affect minorities should be changed, and they should be changed to the least extent needed to resolve the problem.

Let's make this clear: the idea that traditional norms are inherently oppressive, and need to be relentlessly challenged and deconstructed, is a product of postmodernism and critical theory, and these philosophical traditions are not known for being empirical or objective. The fact is, in the real world, the destruction of tradition is actually not required for social justice. More often, traditional institutions, that are imperfect in some way, can be reformed to make them more inclusive and equitable, and that is usually adequate to address social justice concerns. There is simply no need to challenge everything, and tear everything down.

Existing traditions and institutions can often be reformed to become even better, without sacrificing their spirit or essential function. We can do this by bringing people together, to form a consensus through

good-faith discussions, and to then pursue constructive reform. This is almost always the more satisfactory option for everyone involved. I think we really need to deprogram the postmodern critical theory mindset, so that progressive minded people can start to think of constructive reform as the default way to approach imperfect traditions, and abandon the destructive critical deconstruction ideology once and for all.

Moreover, the relentless deconstruction of tradition could also lead to dangerous outcomes. Fascist and fascist-adjacent movements gain popularity through promoting the idea that society is in decline, and the rapid deconstruction of traditional norms feeds into this sentiment. Once these reactionary movements get into power, they can actually do very real harm to the minorities they dislike. Far-left cultural radicalism thus often ends up hurting the people it claims to support. I've even said that it is the opposite of compassionate, because of this. I think we need to talk about this more, so truly compassionate people can make a more rational choice, when it comes to which kind of social progress they want to support.

Why Bad Ideas Persist: History is Written by Those Who Care

The fact that the radical left has a bad model of change, one that always ends up doing more harm than good, and inevitably leaves a generation of young people burnt out, is something that I've written about quite a few times in recent years. As I previously observed, this pattern is one that keeps repeating throughout history, from the French Revolution to the 2010s, yet the lesson never seems to be learned. While there are clearly better models of change that have objectively achieved good results (including the gains from the civil rights movement, women's rights and marriage equality alike), for some reason it seems that society as a whole never learns the lesson as to which models of change are effective, and should be reused in the future, and which are not, and therefore should be discarded. The question is, why do bad models of change refuse to die, and come back with a vengeance every 1-2 generations or so?

I think the answer lies in history: specifically, who is 'writing it', or at least influencing people's perception of it. It is often said that 'history is written by the victors'.

However, I don't think this is actually true at all. Rather, history is written by those who care about it the most, who might or might not be the victors. In some cases, the victors might rewrite history at some point after their initial victory, to bolster their own legitimacy, and importantly, to protect themselves from being overthrown by new rising forces. However, in other cases, it could be that the losers rewrite history to make their ideas look good despite an objectively bad loss, or to make their efforts look worthwhile despite being objectively futile. Thus, both victors and losers can predominate in 'writing history' in different contexts.

In the context of a failed attempt at revolutionary change, I think it is the 'losers' who often end up dominating the way history is told. This is simply because the 'victors', i.e. those who didn't want the change to happen in the first place, simply move on with life. They simply have no reason to revisit an attempt at radical change that they both never wanted and have soundly defeated. On the other hand, the 'losers' would want to make their failed attempt look better, especially if they want to try again further down the road. Moreover, revisiting the history would be a way for the 'losers' to learn what went wrong, and change some of their tactics for next time. (Of course, it might actually be that their whole model is wrong, which would be too

difficult for them to admit. This would likely lead to blaming certain irrelevant factors, and hence the development of unsound theories.)

I think this actually explains the continued survival, and increasingly maladaptive evolution, of the Western far-left's model of change in the past century or so. For example, while the 1960s-70s wave of radicalism was objectively a failure, it was glorified throughout popular culture and certain parts of academia, by those who romanticized about what could have been. This eventually led to the failed model and its flawed ideas being baked into new academic theories of change, which in turn strongly influenced the 2010s 'woke' wave. Of course, doing the same experiment twice in the same way generally yields the same results: just as 1960s-70s radicalism brought about the backlash of the 1980s which left vulnerable people like single moms and gay people feeling the brunt of the backlash, 2010s wokeness has resulted in the 2020s backlash that has harmed the very people it was supposed to help.

Meanwhile, attempts to romanticize 2010s wokeness despite its objective failures are already beginning: whenever I talk about the fact that the Black Lives Matter wave of 2020 didn't actually improve anything, people get quite upset. This is despite my claim being

objectively true. (Actually, my claim of 'no effect' was true in 2024 when I wrote the article. In 2025, it has gotten even worse: BLM would actually have had a negative effect overall by now, as it led to the Trump administration attacking programs benefiting black people in the name of anti-DEI.) Another thing is, in response to trans people complaining about being hurt by the current backlash, those who romanticize 2010s wokeness would claim that things were much worse before. Which is not true. Trust me, I've been there. I lived through it as a trans person who came out in 2006. Things were objectively much better for trans people in 2006 compared to now. Wokeness has achieved nothing but the destruction of whatever little space to exist in that we used to have.

Anyway, the important question is: are we doomed to be forever stuck in this loop of bad radicalism, even worse backlash, rinse and repeat, and never learning the lesson? I think it depends on what we do going forward. Specifically, it depends on those of us, who have been harmed or otherwise disappointed by this history, to actually care enough about it, to tell our side of the story, unrelentingly, until it enters the mainstream public consciousness. At least this is what I'm planning to do, in the hope of finally breaking this vicious cycle. History is written, not necessarily by the victors, but by

those who care. And having to live in a moment of backlash that I never asked for (and even tried hard to prevent) has made me care more about telling my side of our recent history than ever before.

V. Building an Affirmative Case for a Moderate-Libertarian Politics

We Need to Develop the Philosophy to Support a Centrist Politics

It is truly a difficult time to be a centrist right now. Just look at the fact that there are many more far-left and far-right influencers, podcasters, writers and personalities than centrist ones. Most people wouldn't want the thankless task of trying to recover sanity in a world gone mad, when they could be much more popular, and indeed chase after lucrative career opportunities, by choosing one of the extremes and catering exclusively to its supporters. As a centrist, not only are you likely to have a much smaller audience and no income for your hard work, you are also likely to be labelled as a weak, stupid, brainwashed, privileged defender of the status quo. Trust me, I've been called all of these things.

One of the major reasons why centrist politics is in this state is because it lacks a strong philosophical backing. At least in the past seventy years or so, center-left and center-right ideologies have been defined mostly not by intellectual thinkers who think about issues on principle,

but by politicians who take politically calculated positions and make unprincipled deals all the time. In contrast, both far-left constructionism and far-right reactionism were marginalized ideologies without much formal political power until recently, and their recent history was thus dominated by thinkers rather than politicians. This, in turn, means that their stances appear to be much more intellectual and principled, at least to certain people. This is a major reason why centrism is seen as unprincipled, perhaps even untenable in the long run, by more and more people. I truly fear that the center cannot hold if we don't develop a robust intellectual tradition to support it again.

Looking at the ideologies we consider moderate or centrist, which is mainly liberal utilitarianism and organicist conservative-reformism, they once were intellectual powerhouses that had to contend with a very different status quo in times past, in order to gain support. For example, once upon a time, the human pursuit of happiness was not considered a legitimate goal, rather, people were expected to obey religious laws as interpreted by the official state church, whether they liked it or not. To argue against this could lead to charges of heresy. Similarly, people were expected to know and accept their place in the very hierarchical

order of society. Any disobedience against this hierarchical order could be seen as a sign of rebellion, which was generally punishable by death. Thankfully, we don't live in a society like this anymore, because more liberal ideas about how society should be organized ultimately won out. Since then, however, the development of liberal, utilitarian and organicist philosophy and thinking seems to have slowly come to a stop. Liberal reformism became the status quo, which then became stale and despised. What needs to happen is a renewal on the philosophical, intellectual side. Given that the philosophies which underpin liberal reformism once won the battle of ideas, I'm sure it can happen again, but we really need to work to make it happen.

Given the resurgence of essentially medieval ideas about how society should be organized on the far-right, we really need to revive the arguments our predecessors used to defeat the ancien regime of arbitrary power, and update them for the 21st century. On the other hand, 'progressive' intellectualism has come to be dominated by ideas that are basically revolutionary rather than reformist, and often anarchist-adjacent, which share the common assumption that tradition is inherently oppressive, and challenging and dismantling tradition is necessary for progress. However, history has demonstrated that this is not necessarily

true. A liberal reformist program that aims to preserve and respect the spirit of traditions, underpinned by an organicist conservative philosophy, can also effectively advance social justice, and a radical rupture with long-standing norms might not be necessary. It is up to us to make this argument, if only to balance out the excessive and counterproductive radicalism that has become the fashion of the day in many 'progressive' circles.

Building the Philosophical Arguments for a Moderate Politics

Through a combination of observing events in Western politics for more than twenty years, and also learning from historical events that came before my time, I have come to the conclusion that a moderate politics is what would best serve us, in terms of truly making things better for people. Based on the aforementioned objective evidence, I am absolutely certain of this conclusion. Far-left politics is driven by misguided theory that often achieves nothing in practice but division and backlash. On the other hand, reactionary right politics always ends up hurting people, by creating new forms of injustice. A moderate politics is the best way to avoid both extremes, and just as importantly, to avoid society swinging between those two extremes.

Although moderate politics should be a sound choice for any logical thinking person, the problem is that, in practice, it tends to be unattractive to many of the most politically active members of society. This is because its nuances, its acceptance of imperfection, and its insistence in patience in many areas of life is often no match the emotionally charged arguments of both the

far-left and the reactionary right. I believe this 'weakness' can be at least partly overcome by developing sound counter-arguments against the common patterns of thinking and argumentation found in the far-left and the reactionary right respectively. Also, given that both the far-left and the reactionary right often successfully recruit adherents by painting grand (and unrealistic) pictures of their vision, we moderates need to be equally able to paint a vivid picture of our vision, if we want to successfully compete against the extremes.

I will talk about the far-left first. As I've pointed out many times before, the whole politics of the 21st century Western far-left is rooted in two branches of philosophy: postmodernism and critical theory. Therefore, the key to winning the argument against the far-left is to intellectually win the argument against these two worldviews. The way we can approach this is two-fold: firstly, by demonstrating the intellectual unsoundness of these worldviews, and secondly, by demonstrating the real world harms of activism and political action rooted in these worldviews. Postmodernism rejects the pursuit of objective truth, and sees speech and discourse primarily as exercises of power. Identity-based critical theories, often drawing on postmodernism, imagine society as being made up of

interlocking 'systems of oppression', where people are defined as oppressors or the oppressed based on their immutable characteristics. Together, these two overarching philosophical views lead to seeing culture as constructed to oppress the marginalized rather than organically evolved to serve the needs of the people, seeing society as a sphere of powerplay rather than a marketplace of ideas where the objective truth can be pursued, and seeing people as inherently divided into oppressor vs. oppressed groups rather than individuals with their own needs, desires and agency.
Unsurprisingly, a politics rooted in this outlook is often hostile to free speech, and is generally counterproductive in terms of resolving society's most sensitive conflicts. One needs to look no further than 2010s wokeness, its harmful impacts on free speech, and the backlash it ultimately brought, to prove this point. Other previous instances of the far-left causing similarly deleterious effects include the 1960s-70s New Left (which led to the backlash of the 1980s), the 1930s left in Europe (which led to the rise of fascism and World War II), and the actions of the Jacobins during the French Revolution (which led to Napoleon and the restoration of the monarchy). The far-left's formula has produced the same result again and again, and I think it

would be irresponsible to allow them to experiment with society one more time.

The classical liberal tradition, rooted in Enlightenment ideals, provide the most apparent arguments to rebut the postmodern critical theory worldview. That free speech is conducive to understanding the objective truth, and that understanding the truth is necessary for practical progress, is itself a self-evident truth that is provable by the study of history alone. It is for this reason that we must always stand firm for free speech. Also, there are good reasons why we should require objective evidence before we can agree that claims being made are sound. Postmodern critical theory's insistence that society is made up of interlocking systems of oppression simply doesn't meet this standard, and thus should be rejected for the same reason we reject flat-eartherism and anti-vax nonsense alike. Besides, viewing society as being made up of interlocking systems of oppression is simply counterproductive, if we want to bring people together to resolve society's most sensitive conflicts, by finding solutions that would be satisfactory for every party.

The conservative philosophical tradition, going back to thinkers like Edmund Burke, also provide important arguments against the postmodern critical theory

worldview. I've long said that Burkean conservatives were the historical equivalent of today's (genuine) anti-woke liberals. Like today's anti-woke liberals, they saw how the top-down, inorganic imposition of social change, driven by abstract philosophical doctrine, can be harmful to freedom, and also make things worse in unexpected ways in reality. This is why change must be gradual, rooted in practical need rather than abstract philosophy, and implemented in a way that respects society's long-standing values as much as possible. This lesson is one that progressives would do well to learn. This, in turn, is why I have long argued that the philosophical insights of the conservative cannon should be re-integrated into progressive thinking, and this would make for a good foundation for a sustainable reformist politics. Note that the conservative philosophical tradition is very different from what is wrongly called 'conservative' politics in the contemporary West, which is clearly more authoritarian-reactionary than conservative. True conservative philosophy would lead to a moderate reformist politics, and not whatever Trump and his ilk represent.

Now let's talk about the reactionary right. If we look at history, reactionary movements have a uniformly bad track record. They always lead to irrational policies, gross injustices, and often conflict and war. This is

because they are emotionally charged and irrational, and often deliberately so. Reactionary politics often takes advantage of widespread frustration with a certain phenomenon (wokeness being the most recent example), and turn it into fuel for a destructive politics that serves those with a questionable agenda, by using emotion to bypass rationality. In moments of reactionary emotion, the normal rational function of humans is impaired, and what would normally be rejected can often be accepted. This effect is often deliberately enhanced further by the use of peer pressure, tribalism, and exaggerated portrayals of the 'enemy' or the issue causing concern. Moderates need to be able to neutralize the tactics used to build reactionary political movements. We also need to be able to address the frustrations being seized upon by reactionaries, in order to stop them from being able to mass recruit people to their cause. I believe moderates are much more effective at doing this than the far-left, simply because we are practical, empirical and evidence-based, and aren't blinded by ideological dogma like much of the far-left is.

In conclusion, we need to develop philosophical arguments to justify a moderate politics, to paint a picture of why a moderate reformist politics is better than the alternatives of the far-left and the reactionary

right, in order to win the battle against these extremes in the marketplace of ideas. To do so, we can draw from both the Enlightenment-classical liberal tradition and the Burkean conservative tradition. We should also point to concrete historical examples to illustrate our point. Finally, we need to address and neutralize the core ideas that motivate the far-left and the reactionary right respectively: for the far-left, this would be postmodern critical theory, and for the reactionary right, this would be whatever frustration they are seizing on to weaponize. The effective use of rationality to neutralize and defeat bad ideas will be crucial to our success.

Why Moderates Don't Have Enough Faith in Ourselves

Last time, in my post about the implications of the shutting down of 'heterodox liberal' media outlets due to funding drying up, I concluded that a truly free-thinking liberal community can only exist if there are enough people who are passionate enough about our cause to work for free if necessary. Political movements simply can't survive and also maintain integrity long-term if they depend on funding from donors for their existence, because political winds and incentives shift all the time. Instead, the torch can only be carried forward in the long run by passionate true believers who will be able to do the necessary work even without renumeration. The far-left definitely has plenty of people who are willing to do this. As for the heterodox 'classical liberal' community? I have my own serious doubts, to be honest.

I think one reason why the far-left (including both old-school class-first leftists and postmodern 'woke left' activists, and everything else in between) has such a large number of passionate true believers, is because they have a kind of moral confidence that we moderates

simply don't have. One reason for this is simply because those with more nuanced beliefs tend to be less confident of everything, while those with more black-or-white beliefs tend to have a misguided level of overconfidence. This applies not just to the far-left, but also to the 'populist' New Right too. On the other hand, the huge discrepancy in confidence and passion between the far-left and moderate liberals and reformists is not inevitable. It is the product of our recent political history.

The split between liberal reformists and the far-left originated partly from the split in the European left of the early 20th century, between those who favored reform and those who favored revolution. In the century since, liberal reformists have been able to get into government, and have been generally represented by one of the two major parties of government in most Western countries. Liberal reformism thus carries all the successes, but also all the failures and controversies, of the party and the administrations that supposedly represent the ideology. These failures and controversies include moments that most of us wouldn't be proud of, like the Vietnam War happening under the Democrats in the 1960s, the Clinton crime bill and the Defense of Marriage Act in the 1990s, Britain's Tony Blair agreeing to join Dubya Bush's War in Iraq, and Obama bailing out

the big banks, for example. Making mistakes in judgement is part and parcel of being in power, and isn't automatically reflective of the ideology being flawed. But all this does weigh on our confidence and credibility over time.

Meanwhile, the far-left were permanently shut out of government and formal power, but built a prominent presence in certain parts of academia, as well as in activist circles. There, they developed their own theories of how things work, and how change can be enacted. These theories basically revisited the aforementioned reform vs revolution divide, and often boiled down to demonizing reformism while upholding the supposed righteousness of the worldview of the revolutionary camp. While these theories were largely untested before the 2010s, the kind of self-justifying circular reasoning often employed in New Left theory meant that those who held that worldview were able to reify, at least within their own circles, their theoretically-justified superiority simply through repetition and reinforcement, paired with repeated demonization of alternative points of view. This worked because there was no empirical reality to challenge the theory, in turn because the far-left never had an opportunity to truly implement their worldview. I believe the 2010s 'woke left' was the first time some far-left ideas and theories,

at least those pertaining to identity and speech, had a chance to be implemented in the real world, and the failures provide empirical evidence of the unsoundness of the far-left worldview. But this was a very recent development, and the moral confidence of the Western far-left was generally on the ascendancy for much of the previous 60 years.

Thus liberal reformism, the philosophy that made possible everything from women's suffrage to civil rights to gay marriage, ultimately crashed in confidence and popularity, partly as a victim of its own success, while the far-left's revolutionary philosophy was able to build up claims to the moral high ground, simply because they were denied real power and thus never had to contend with reality as a whole. What we need to remember is that all this was never based on empirical reality. The far-left has never delivered anything that actually made people's lives better. All their protests, disruptions and drama has been for nothing at best, and the cause of harmful right-wing backlash at worst. For example, Black Lives Matter 2020 not only did not make things any better for the average black person, it is arguably at the center of the backlash that enabled the Trump administration to take away long-standing support structures for the black community in the name of anti-DEI. The LGBT rights movement was going fine under

the leadership of reformist liberals, and even won difficult battles like gay marriage, until the radicals took over in the mid-to-late 2010s, which led to a major backlash that is harming actual LGBT people in real life right now. All this is to say, the moral high ground claims of the far-left is not justified by how reality has played out, and should be thoroughly challenged on this ground alone. The far-left really needs to be held accountable for their failures for once.

Now, let me digress a bit, and respond to ongoing criticisms of the way I use the word 'woke' by those aligned with the activist left. The reason why I use the word 'woke' the way most people use it nowadays is because this is conducive to effective communication. More specifically, we need a common language to be able to talk about the misguided ideas of a certain faction of the activist left. Just calling them 'the left' won't do, because there are plenty of class-first leftists who don't believe in this stuff, and they have protested whenever I used 'the left' or even 'the far-left' to describe woke ideology and activism, and in some cases actually suggesting that I should use the 'woke' terminology instead. The fact is, we need a common language, and indeed a simple term, to describe what is going on. My preferred term would actually be 'critical anarchism', but just like 'postmodern neo-Marxism',

‘identity socialism’, ‘the successor ideology’ and other proposals, it has not been widely adopted, and ‘woke’ is the word everyone uses nowadays. I actually think it’s unfortunate that the word originally came from black Americans meaning something very different, and I personally wouldn’t have chosen this word for this reason, but as I just said, it’s not up to me to choose what word to describe the phenomenon. What is important here, however, is that there is a word we can use to describe it (as Freddie DeBoer famously argued back in 2021), so we can hold it accountable for the harms that it has caused. From what I see, refusing to allow us to have a word to describe the ideology is just a slippery way to avoid accountability, and I think it’s of utmost importance that we don’t allow this to happen. This is why, all things considered, I still think the ongoing use of the word ‘woke’ to describe the postmodern-critical faction of the far-left, even if it is controversial and not ideal at all, is still the lesser evil.

Returning to my original theme, I really think it’s important that we begin upholding and celebrating the very real gains of liberal and moderate reformism (everything from women’s suffrage to civil rights to gay marriage, and also many other things), and also call out the very real harms far-left revolutionary ideology, especially the ‘woke’ version, has caused. Only by doing

this would we be able to right the historical wrong of an unjustifiably claimed moral high ground, and stop the far-left from confusing another generation of youth that their way is the only valid way to bring about social justice. Only by doing this would we be able to rebuild the confidence around the liberal and moderate reformist project, including its necessary disagreements with the far-left. And only by doing this would we be able to build a community that is truly passionate about the liberal reformist project, driven by the belief that our way is actually the best way to improve lives and bring about justice. If we can achieve this, then we would have the foundations for a long-term political movement driven by values and the passion of volunteers, and we won't be at the mercy of donors and think tanks anymore.

Let's Undo the Extremism that Online Culture has Bred

In recent years, the level of political polarization in the West has gotten more and more people very concerned. It seems that people can't even have rational conversations anymore. The most extreme voices on both sides dominate the discourse, and those in the middle increasingly just don't say anything, for fear of upsetting the wrong people. Meanwhile, both sides are left to radicalize further and further over time. Things are really getting out of control in a bad way.

What we need to remember is that it was not always like this. If you look at the political conversation just ten years or so ago, things were much healthier, even if not quite perfect. At least there were people on both sides who were willing to have good faith debates with each other. There was a time when left-right debates were quite common, even if they were often just a vehicle to advance the careers of the two personalities doing the debate. We don't see such debates as much anymore, and I think it's a shame, because those debates at least were often able to establish some common ground. In contrast, political commentary nowadays tends to be

just people in an echo chamber talking to each other, often assuming those who disagree to be enemies that are not worthy of taking seriously. How far we've fallen as a society!

The fact is, both sides are probably too far radicalized to find common ground with each other anymore. I think the algorithms designed by greedy social media companies, which encourage clickbait and outrageous content for the sake of ad revenue, deserves the lion's share of the blame for what has happened. The invisible hand of the algorithm has divided the political discourse into two mutually exclusive and opposing camps, and it has also encouraged both camps to radicalize further and further away from each other. In any case, it's now up to us, the remaining moderates, to keep alive what was still a widespread hope just a decade ago: that we can come together to find common ground, have rational debates, and resolve our differences in a respectful way. I mean, we can't just let the dream die, right?

But how can we save the dream? Firstly, we have to be very aware of what is happening. The hardened narratives on both sides aren't rational, and are essentially the product of technology gone wrong. We need to see through them, and criticize them well. In

particular, we need to bravely call out the most ridiculous, authoritarian and inhumane aspects of the lunacy on both sides. We need to learn to be able to say no to the outrageous stuff being dished out by influencers who thrive on controversy. We also need to be able to say, wait a minute, let's examine the facts first, when faced with emotionally manipulative rhetoric. The age of the contrarian influencer being able to promote and normalize questionable ideas in a fact-free way without pushback needs to end, period.

Secondly, we need to keep the principled, moderate discourse alive. As I previously said, this cannot be a procedural moderatism aimed at remaining in the middle of whatever Overton Window we find ourselves in, because this would mean we would just be dragged towards whichever extreme is winning the tug of war at the moment on a particular issue. Instead, ours must be a values-based moderatism, consistently and unwaveringly upholding values like empathy, compassion, independent thinking, objectivity, commitment to the truth, anti-tribalism and honesty, even in the face of the most immense peer pressure. We need to keep the balanced, compassionate and hence moderate narrative alive, so that it can hopefully eventually shine through against all the partisan and extremist nonsense around us.

Finally, if the far-left and the far-right are both so far gone that they can't talk to each other, it's up to us moderates to take the conversation to them, to challenge their nonsense. They might not be interested in debating us, or even having a conversation with us, but we sure need to have a conversation about their ideas, if only to debunk the worst each side has to offer, in order to protect society from their worst consequences. The current discourse of the right is heavily polluted by baseless conspiracy theories, anti-science attitudes, racist ideas, and very real animus towards LGBT people. Meanwhile, the left's insistence on remaining wedded to their empirically false and widely rejected ideological theories, often to the extent of refusing to have debates with those who reject their worldview, also contributes to the polarization and toxic stalemate that we are in. These things prevent us from finding common ground and having a rational debate, and we must call them out if we want to heal the political landscape. This is why, as a moderate, I will continue to offer my best critique of the excesses of both sides, accompanied by a justification of why the moderate path is the better way. I hope more moderates can join me in doing so over time.

I believe we can still fight our way back towards a saner world. However, given that we are indeed working

against powerful forces aided by flawed technology that has arguably gone out of control, we really need to consciously work to fix things, if we are to have any chance of getting out of this mess.

The Case for a Moderate Politics Based on Values

A recurrent theme of my work in recent years is to think about how we can critique the 'woke left', while not falling into the reactionary right pipeline, or at least be subconsciously 'infected' by the narrative being manufactured by the reactionary right. This has proven to be a challenge for many, for various reasons. Firstly, the reactionary right is a huge presence, and often intrudes into the libertarian and anti-woke discourses without being invited. Secondly, there's the phenomenon of audience capture, where creators keep chasing the evolving tastes of their audiences, while these evolving tastes are being strongly influenced by the reactionary right narrative. This factor is especially important for those who do political commentary for a living. Finally, having been rejected from left-wing circles in the past, many woke-critical creators have an inherent fear of upsetting people who appear to be friendly to them, because they know what sudden ostracization by former friends feels like, and really don't want to experience it all over again. Meanwhile, the reactionary right is a real power player, and they really have all the

cards over woke-critical commentators who have the aforementioned fears. The challenge for us, I guess, is to stay true to our values, even in the face of all this.

One effective strategy is to simply declare ourselves 'moderates', and be committed to moderation in our views on everything. This would mean we are already rejecting both the far-left and the far-right, by definition. And as I have previously illustrated, there are indeed many valid justifications to pursue moderation as a good in and of itself. However, even moderation per se can have its limitations. When you're in a place where the Overton Window is strongly affected by one force pulling things in a particular direction, you might try to stay 'moderate' by staying in the middle of the Overton Window, but still get pulled in the direction of the greater force at work. This, I think, is how ostensibly 'moderate' center-leftists ended up parroting woke-left talking points, or ostensibly 'moderate' anti-woke influencers begin parroting parts of the reactionary right's narrative. The most extreme example of this phenomenon is the commonly talked about case where, someone who was a 'moderate' in the Third Reich would still have been an accomplice to genocide at the very least. And this is of course no good. A true moderate would need to be able to notice the pernicious influence

of extreme ideas, and decisively oppose them, rather than accommodate them.

Which is why I think we need to embrace a form of 'moderatism' that is rooted in values that justify our moderation, rather than just looking to remain in the 'center' of whatever Overton Window we find ourselves in. Values like independent thinking, anti-tribalism, commitment to free speech, commitment to the objective truth, compassion and honesty generally work to keep our politics moderate. For example, commitment to independent thinking and rejection of tribalism would allow us to see where manufactured political narratives are biased and unfair. Commitment to the objective truth would mean investigating claims made by influencers rather than just accepting them because we 'trust them'. Compassion would mean we truly listen to what everyone has to say in good faith, and seriously take into account concerns coming from different places. I think if we did these things consistently, they would always lead us to conclusions that are politically moderate. A political moderatism that is the product of being committed to these values, rather than just being committed to occupying the center of the Overton Window, would prevent us from being dragged towards the extremes in slow motion by

pernicious forces trying to normalize extreme and inhumane ideas.

Moral Libertarianism is the Solution to End the Culture Wars

I think it's time we start coming up with solutions to end the culture wars. Given that this won't be an easy task, we have to come up with lots and lots of ideas, and put them into practice concurrently. This is why I'm going to dedicate quite a bit of time talking about ideas to help us end the culture wars going forward.

I will expand on an idea I've long talked about: why re-strengthening the classical liberal consensus in general, and specifically arguing for the model of Moral Libertarianism, is the most effective way we can put an end to the culture wars. Classical liberalism was invented in Western Europe as a response to the religious conflicts that had plagued the continent since the late middle ages. The basic rationale was that, if government and politics basically stayed neutral on religious issues, then the conflict could come to an end. This is the reason why America was founded without a state church, for example. Over time, liberalism was able to slowly bring the religious wars to an end. Besides that, liberalism also ushered in a new era of respect for free speech, freedom of conscience, pluralism in ideas

and worldviews, and scientific discovery. It is arguably one of the most effective philosophies the West has ever come up with.

While the religious wars are long gone, old habits die hard in every culture. What the religious wars showed us was that in Western culture, issues of right and wrong are often settled by conflict rather than consensus. Compared with most other cultures on Earth, the West is much more prone to society-wide philosophical conflicts. Let's face it: this history, plus the individualistic nature of the West, means that we aren't going to become a consensus society anytime soon. If the arguments and conflicts aren't fought over religion, then they are likely to be fought over other grounds. This is why, in an era where people are less religious than before, the culture wars have replaced the religious wars. And just like the religious wars, the culture wars are also inherently tied to political factions, with powerful players picking sides and rallying their supporters with highly moralistic rhetoric.

While the religious wars were cured by liberalism and its separation of church and state, this model of neutrality has not yet been fully extended to other, non-theological conflicts. This has effectively allowed the politicized religious wars of the past to be reborn as

politicized culture wars. The 'woke' postmodern left, the reactionary 'postliberals', and every faction in between are effectively like the churches of the past, with both a worldview and doctrine that its followers have to adhere to, and a goal to capture and control the politics of the country and dictate its policies. Just like the religious wars, in the culture wars the stakes are basically the triumph or defeat of one worldview or another, seen as a struggle between good and evil, where one's own side is good and the other side inevitably evil. This means that, just like several hundred years ago, the West is now on the brink of permanently heightened conflict and repeated tragedies, unless something is done to stop the culture wars in its tracks.

The answer, I believe, is to extend the classical liberal model of religious neutrality to other areas of life and culture generally. Rather than just being neutral about religion in a narrow sense, the state should be neutral about competing moral claims as much as possible. It should allow individuals, families and communities to preach and practice their sincerely held moral values, as long as it doesn't take away from the freedom of other individuals, families and communities to do the same. Competing moral worldviews can then truly compete in the marketplace of ideas, with their success or failure ultimately judged by the objective reality of the long-

term outcomes of their adherents. This is what Moral Libertarianism is, in a nutshell. When everyone can do their own thing, and they can be confident that in the future, should their views be correct, they will be rewarded by objective reality, there will be no need for the culture wars at all.

The actual reason why I have been so opposed to postmodern critical theory is that it is ultimately incompatible with the Moral Libertarian vision. The Moral Libertarian vision demands that every individual be given equal and maximum moral agency over their own actions, which postmodern activists are simply opposed to. Justified by a worldview of intersecting identity-based oppressor vs oppressed dynamics, and believing that our culture is a social construct to serve the oppressors, postmodernists won't even respect the most basic of moral freedoms, namely free speech and freedom of conscience. This is why Moral Libertarianism and postmodern critical theory can't just co-exist in a compatible way: the triumph of one would necessary have to mean the defeat of the other, logically.

On the other hand, postmodern critical theory activists are not the only ones who are fueling the current culture wars, nor are they the only force out there making the Moral Libertarian vision difficult to achieve.

Right-wing 'postliberal' culture warriors, often strongly influenced by old and new media in the service of organized right-wing politics, are no more respectful of other people's moral agency. Look no further than the War on Disney, the book bans and the drag bans. The fact is, over the past few years, a new, more authoritarian strain of the right has arisen, complete with its own thinkers, influencers and political leaders, and it is clearly intent on using state power to limit the freedoms of ordinary citizens. This is arguably even further away from equal moral agency than what the postmodern left is doing. Their political methods actually move things in the most dangerous direction, i.e. back to the total conflation of culture, philosophy and tribal politics that caused the religious wars to erupt in Europe several hundred years ago.

As you can see, not only does Moral Libertarianism provide the way out of the culture wars, the political factions most engaged in the culture wars are also the ones least compatible with the Moral Libertarian ideal. Therefore, to uphold the Moral Libertarian ideal is both to point to the exit of the culture wars, as well as to take a stand against the worst of the culture warriors, at the same time. I believe this is the way the West must go, if only to preserve a peaceful society for the foreseeable future.

Why Allowing More Freedom is Generally the Morally Better Choice

Over the years, I have illustrated why values like free speech, free expression and freedom of conscience are important in multiple ways. However, what I call the 'competitive morality' case for freedom might yet be the most important reason why freedom is important to maintain. Given both the left and the right have become increasingly disrespectful towards long-standing norms that safeguard freedom in recent years, I think this is a message people across the Western world really need to hear right now.

Basically, history has shown us that things can be done better. The way we do things today is much improved compared with back in the middle ages, or even during the industrial revolution, for example. While improvements in material conditions, methods of production and technology are most often celebrated, morality has also been improving over the generations. While things are still far from perfect, morality has overall been objectively improving over the centuries.

We don't allow slavery, the torture of prisoners, and duels to the death anymore, for example. Given this history, there is every reason to believe that morality can continue to improve into the future.

The main drivers of improvement are innovation and competition. This is clear to see when we are talking about technology. However, it also applies to matters of morality. If everyone just accepted slavery as part of life, it would never have been abolished. This demonstrates the importance of allowing enough freedom for innovation. On the other hand, if the anti-slavery message wasn't able to compete with those arguing for the then-status quo on an equal footing, it might not have won out, despite being objectively more sound. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining a fair playing field in the marketplace of ideas. Both of the aforementioned objectives would require free speech, free expression and freedom of conscience. It is freedom that both allows innovation, and allows fair competition in the marketplace of ideas. Therefore, ultimately it is freedom that allows morality to improve over time.

Looking at history would confirm this theory. Societies that were more free and open generated more improvements in morality. Even though the freedom to

experiment might sometimes lead to errors too, overall speaking, allowing this freedom is worthwhile in the end, especially in light of the resulting improvements being able to benefit many generations to come. This is why, looking at it from a broad picture scale, allowing more freedom is objectively more moral. It is proven by both history and logic. I think we should take this into account when assessing political options, for example when voting. I believe that, generally speaking, supporting choices that are overall orientated towards more freedom, as well as punishing politicians that actively advocate for less freedom, is generally correct as a principle.

In Praise of the Politics of Rejection

Rejection is often thought of as a negative word. However, it recently dawned on me that the formative events of much of my own politics were actually rooted in rejection. In the aughts, my politics revolved around rejecting the Iraq War and the broader 'War on Terror' narrative. Later on, it also encompassed rejection of the religious right, because they insisted on re-electing the administration responsible for the war as long as they opposed gay marriage. By the teens, it was the left's turn to be the target of my rejection, with the rise of cancel culture, oppressor vs. oppressed critical theories, and anti-science postmodern philosophy. More recently, the populist right's divisive culture wars, willingness to use authoritarian state power to wage these culture wars, and general anti-science attitude have become the latest targets of my rejection.

While all three groups of phenomenon that I rejected were promoted by different political factions (neocon hawks, the 'woke' left and the MAGA/populist right respectively), there are actually several things common to all of them. Firstly, all three were attempts to seize on

very real frustrations and worries in the community to justify a grandiose, unjustifiably broad, and deeply authoritarian agenda. In each case, while there are real issues that need to be addressed, there could have been more practical, non-ideological, non-divisive, non-tribalistic and pro-freedom ways of addressing those issues. Terror attacks could be prevented by better policing and intelligence operations, social justice is best served by taking an evidence-based approach to issues, and cancel culture can be defeated by upholding classical liberal values, for example. However, in all three cases, those promoting the grandiose authoritarian agenda falsely claimed that the simpler solution would be 'weak', ineffective and/or inadequate. In all three cases, they appeal to emotion rather than objective facts in making those claims.

Secondly, in all three cases, those promoting the grandiose authoritarian agenda tried to shut down free speech that questioned their agenda. This is because the agenda simply wouldn't survive rational scrutiny. The Iraq War wouldn't have made America and the West any safer from terrorism. Cancel culture and postmodern critical theory are actually deleterious for social justice. On the other hand, cancel culture won't be defeated by more cancel culture, in the form of book bans and right-wing governments joining the culture

war and trampling on free speech. These are all self-evident facts that become apparent to most people once emotionally charged appeals are successfully deflected and defeated.

Thirdly, the grandiose authoritarian agenda in question is (was) actually rooted in deeply ideological and philosophical positions, rather than being actually rooted in the immediate issues and frustrations. This means that their promotion as a solution to these issues and frustrations is deliberate and opportunistic, rather than honest and organic. This is another reason why those promoting the grandiose authoritarian agenda have been unfriendly to free speech, in all three cases. They do not want their deeply ideological worldview to be exposed, because this would make most people skeptical of their agenda.

Finally, in each case, to stand against the grandiose authoritarian agenda being presented is (was) actually essential for the preservation of free speech, freedom of conscience, objectivity, scientific integrity, compassion, and more. All three are very good examples that demonstrate the necessity of rejection of bad ideas, especially where they are packaged into a broad 'transformative' agenda to be achieved by authoritarian means, in protecting our long-standing freedoms and

values. They demonstrate that skepticism towards grandiose authoritarian agenda, especially when they are backed by the forces of well-funded media outlets, limitations on free speech and/or peer pressure in any shape or form, plays a crucial role in preserving our freedoms and values. Far from being negative, rejection is the immune system of society, defending what we have from being destroyed by rogue actors and actions. This is why I believe it's time we actually formally recognize the importance of rejection as part of our arsenal of political tools to defend and promote freedom, and give it the pride of place it deserves in history.

Note that praising and practicing rejection doesn't mean we simply reject every new idea on offer, in a nihilistic or 'blackpilled' way. Instead, we should reject overly broad, authoritarian, grandiose ideological agendas and narratives, while having a strong preference to work with individual issues on an issue-by-issue basis, in a practical and non-ideological way. For example, I'm actually a big supporter of many great reformist ideas, from the Universal Basic Income (UBI), to Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), to further limiting arbitrary political power, for example by limiting executive pardons. These positions are not part of an overarching grandiose agenda seeking to re-make society in authoritarian

ways, nor are they exclusive to those who are committed to a particular worldview, ideology or political philosophy. Instead, they are simply ideas that people came up with to make society fairer, based on real problems that have been observed in real life. A politics of rejection that excludes grandiose authoritarian agendas actually leaves more space to debate and work through proposals for practical reform like these.

Finally, if we practice the politics of rejection consistently, i.e. equally towards grandiose authoritarian agendas coming from all camps, we will end up with a truly non-aligned politics that values independent thinking, free speech and freedom of conscience. And I believe the Western world really needs a truly non-aligned politics right now. Let's face it: all those political factions or tribes promoting their own authoritarian agendas want you to be part of their tribe, so they can build the critical mass required to enable them to enact their agenda. In this regard, the neocon hawks, the 'woke left', the populist right, and other factions are basically the same. A true politics of rejection would reject them all equally. This is in contrast to a politics that only focuses on rejecting one agenda, like the 2010s anti-woke movement did. While refusing to align with the 'woke left', some people got pulled gradually to

align with the equally authoritarian populist right instead. It was the narrow focus on rejecting only one set of ideological politics that allowed the movement to be partially hijacked by another ideological tribe. Learning from that mistake would point us in the direction of practicing a politics of consistent skepticism, consistent rejection of all ideologically-driven grandiose authoritarian agendas, and hence consistent non-alignment. Here's three cheers to a consistent politics of rejection!

VI. Further Thoughts on the Authoritarian Nature of the Left vs. Right Paradigm

Why the Left Invented the 'Right', and why it's Pushing People Towards Trump

In this article, I want to further explore the idea that the 'right' is an artificial construct, that I first discussed in a recent article about why libertarians should oppose tariffs, and why they need to 'leave the right' to do that effectively. In that article, I reasoned that 'the right' can't refer to conservatism per se, because Trump is clearly not conservative by the standards of Burkean conservative philosophy, and it also can't refer to the original meaning of the 'right' as coined during the time of the French Revolution, because most of today's 'right' clearly aren't monarchists, which was the thing that defined the French right back in the 18th century. I hence concluded that the 'right', in its current usage, is simply a collection of people, groups and ideas that are skeptical about, and critical of, the ideas of the 'left'. This time, I want to expand on this analysis, and find out who exactly the artificial construction of the 'right' actually serves.

In society's discourse, words often come to have the meaning that the group most keen on using it give it. A good example is 'woke'. While 'woke' historically originated in African American English, and referred to the need to be conscious about racism against black people, during the 2010s it was adopted by postmodern critical theory-inspired activists to denote belief in their worldview of interlocking systems of oppression (which was also not limited to racial oppression). Later on, with the rise of anti-woke critique, 'woke' became associated with an unpopular style of activism that is defined by an oppressor vs. oppressed worldview, and deploys tactics like cancel culture, and hence began to carry a negative connotation. To this day, many linguistic purists like to insist that only the original meaning of 'woke' is valid, and that the latter meanings are a misuse of the word, or worse, an invention by racist people to hijack the word. However, it has also become an objective fact that the word 'woke' is now used pejoratively most of the time. If you hear someone say that a certain politician or celebrity is 'woke' in 2025, it is most likely that they are criticizing that person, often for a belief or behavior that has nothing to do with racism at all, rather than praising them for being actively aware of racism. Thus, as always, words effectively come to be defined by the people who

are using them most prominently, most loudly and most frequently, whether we like it or not.

Using this logic, our current definition of the 'right' should logically stem from the way it is used by the group who use it the most. I think that would actually be the leftists. (Note that 'leftists' here refers to self-identified leftists, who are much further left than the mainstream center-left like the Democrats or Labour, and they generally reject the center-left as being part of the left. This is important because, as I illustrated last time, the far-left is basically at war with the center-left, and I consider the center-left to be fellow travelers, but not the far-left.) Leftists generally use the word 'right-wing' very pejoratively, often with an implied meaning of being on the same side as the fascists. They tend to use it to describe, and hence lump together, adherents of all political ideologies that disagree with contemporary leftist philosophy, including classical liberals, libertarians, moderates and centrists, conservatives, reactionaries, and actual fascists alike. The more extreme leftists might even label the mainstream center-left as 'right-wing', simply because they, too, disagree with much of the leftist agenda. This is why we sometimes hear them unironically say that 'Joe Biden is right-wing'. Furthermore, given that the current dominant version of leftist philosophy, at least in

the West, is the version that talks about intersecting systems of oppression, even old-school class-first socialists have occasionally been labelled as somehow right-adjacent (using language like 'Strasserism', 'red-brown alliance'), simply because they reject intersectional identity politics. Putting all this together, it is clear that the 'right', as constructed by leftists, is simply anyone who disagrees with the current dominant version of leftist philosophy. This is consistent with my hypothesis from last time.

This is what we've found so far: the original 'right' of 18th century Europe is long gone, because most people don't support hereditary monarchy with real powers nowadays. As such, the category of 'right' should have logically ceased to exist. Just like the categories of 'Whig', 'Federalist', 'Jacobin', 'Girondin', 'Menshevik' and so on, it describes a real political faction complete with a well-defined ideology and platform that used to exist once upon a time, but no longer exists in a meaningful way. If not for the leftists' continued use of the word 'right' to describe their opponents, the 'right' would have become historicized like the other aforementioned categories. Note that those who identify as leftists in the 21st century West are not the same as the original 'left' of 18th century Europe either. They identify themselves as leftists because they believe they are a continuation

of that tradition, but it doesn't make them the same thing. That they choose to identify as leftists has logically meant that they have invented the category of 'right' to apply to those they perceive as their opponents.

Hence what is called the 'right' is basically just a collection of left-criticals, who often don't have much common ground with each other. I mean, logically speaking, a 'tent' that includes such contradictory elements like both libertarians and fascists, and both isolationists and neocon interventionists, can't ever make sense as a coherent category. Leftists often justify the existence of distinct 'left' and 'right' camps, by saying that the left is for social justice and dismantling hierarchies, and the right is for maintaining the status quo and maintaining hierarchies. However, this is no more than a self-definition of the left by leftists, plus taking the opposite of that to define the 'right'. It also doesn't hold up to empirical observation: libertarians clearly aren't the biggest fans of hierarchy, for example, even though leftists have placed them in the 'right' camp. The fact is, the 'right' objectively doesn't meaningfully exist in the way leftists imagine it to. Leftists created the category of 'the right' to satisfy the needs of their own ideology and political organizing. It is functionally the same as the category of 'infidel' that is

often created by organized religion to include those of the same religion who have unconventional views, those who believe in a different religion, and those who don't believe in any religion alike. These categories don't mean anything useful in reality, except to denote an outgroup for the ingroup.

Now, some might argue that the 'right' is indeed a valid category because some people actively identify with it. While my above analysis is objectively true, it is also objectively true that some people self-identify as being 'on the right'. This, I think, is because there have been political forces that have actively encouraged left-critical people to adopt an identity of being on the 'right'. The people doing that are usually a particularly well-funded and well-organized faction among the left-criticals, who want to scoop up the support of the rest of the left-criticals to build a movement to serve their own agenda. Historically, this was mostly the neoconservative fusionists who brought together a 'three legged stool' coalition of free market capitalists, foreign interventionists and the religious right. Ever since this coalition fell apart in the aftermath of Bush-43's failures, 'right' identity has mostly been championed by reactionary populists, to gather support for Trump and other Trump-like figures. During the 2010s, there were countless articles encouraging those who disagree with

wokeness to identify as part of a 'new right', for example. In both aforementioned cases, encouraging people to actively uptake the identity of being on the 'right' was a method of political coalition building, to paper over the very real differences between different kinds of left-criticals. It is in this context that libertarianism has fallen prey to a Trump-induced identity crisis, much to my own dismay.

As a libertarian reformist, I don't want to be forced to agree with people who want the government to wage the culture wars for them, trampling on free speech in the process, just because I disagree with left-wing cancel culture too. As a progressive conservative, I favor gradual, sustainable social improvement, and I don't have much common ground with those who want to turn the clock back by decades. The reactionary right is clearly my enemy, not my friend. There is no valid category that can include the both of us. This is why I'm certainly not 'on the right', even though I am critical of leftism as it exists.

In summary, the 'right', as we know it, is a category leftists invented to lump together those who disagree with its philosophy. In turn, reactionary billionaires looking to protect their own vested interests and advance their questionable agendas made it more of a

real category by encouraging as many left-criticals to identify with it as possible, so as to create a political movement to get their people elected. However, the 'right' is ultimately a category designed (by both these forces) to flatten out the very real disagreements among different kinds of left-criticals, which is bad for independent thinking, freedom of conscience and free speech. What I'm also worried about is that this could mislead freedom loving people to support authoritarian ideologies, or mislead cautiously progressive but otherwise open-minded people to support reactionary ideologies. Therefore, we should challenge the lumping of different and contradictory forms of left-criticalism under the category of the 'right'. I think we would do better without it.

Why 'Progressive' vs 'Conservative' is Misguided

Western politics, particularly in the English-speaking world, has long been defined in the popular imagination as a contest between ‘progressives’ and ‘conservatives’. This picture has persisted because it is a convenient way to describe the two-party system that was a natural by-product of the Anglo-American election systems. However, it has been inadequate in explaining our current political landscape, where those who occupy the extreme-left and the extreme-right have become both louder and more influential. In particular, it has robbed us of the language to describe intra-party splits between the extremists and the moderates on both sides, which has become a significant feature of the political landscape in almost every Western country.

Looking at it historically, the concept of the left-right divide originated in France, back around the time of the French Revolution. Those on the ‘left’ were for the Republic and democracy, while those on the ‘right’ were royalists. As you can see, the dividing lines were very different to what we have today. Most people alive today would clearly be on the ‘left’ in the original sense,

simply because we don't support absolute monarchy! Therefore, the 'left-right' concept we have today, while clearly borrowed from 18th century France, is actually a much more recent invention. It is the result of radicals self-identifying as progressives while excluding moderates from the tent, as well as reactionaries claiming to be 'conservatives' to make themselves look better. While everyone in mainstream politics was relatively moderate in the 20th century, this fiction might have worked to some extent. But now that the extremists on both sides have gotten louder, the fiction is clearly unravelling.

Let's start with the 'conservative' camp first. Many self-identified conservatives, particularly in the English-speaking world, claim that their ideology is descended from the philosophy of Edmund Burke. However, this claim has always been contentious, given that even the policy agenda of 20th century establishment conservatives were not always in line with Burke's ideas or actions. For example, the right's small government immediatism often created radical social changes that were anathema to the Burkean respect for tradition. Meanwhile, the right's posture on cultural issues had often been to resist all change unconditionally, which was clearly more extreme than Burke's own approach during his lifetime. However, even with these

inconsistencies, the 20th century right could still plausibly claim that they were guided by Burkean values of caution and respect for tradition. Now that Trump has become the dominant figure on the right, their claim to the Burkean tradition has totally crumbled. The fact that Trump has been pushing boundaries and damaging long-standing conventions almost weekly, yet many on the right continue to enthusiastically support him, leaves no doubt as to the true goals of the right: to be reactionary, rather than conservative in the Burkean sense. It appears that Burkean philosophy was only a facade for many on the right all along, the real goal was always political and social reactionism.

Meanwhile, in the 'progressive' camp, the divide between moderates and radicals has grown so large that it has become difficult to believe that they are in the same camp anymore. Historically, moderates and radicals basically had no common ground, apart from a vague common commitment to social justice and democracy, but even these concepts were interpreted in very different ways. When it comes to what was actually to be done, moderates and radicals often held diametrically opposite views, with moderates preferring to work with society as it exists, and push for gradual reform organically, while radicals often wanted a 'burn everything to the ground' style revolution. After the

upheavals of the early 20th century gave way to the post-war emphasis on stability, the difference between radicals and moderates began to be blurred, with radicals generally sidelined in practice. However, after the 2008-9 Global Financial Crisis, radicalism made a big return, and the united 'progressive' fiction became more and more untenable. As the 2010s rolled on, it became clear to many moderate progressives that radicals don't actually want what we want at all. Instead, their actions are blocking the pathway to change we prefer, and their divisive behavior is actively encouraging a reactionary backlash that would ruin all of our plans.

In the ongoing arguments between the radicals and the moderates, the radicals started out in a stronger position, because they came armed with a lot of political philosophy and theory. While I maintain that much of that theory is misguided (hence I'm a moderate), it still meant that the radicals had a level of clarity on what they wanted, as well as the language to articulate it, while we moderates didn't have any of that. Over time, we began articulating our core values like free speech, objectivity, scientific integrity, practicality, compassion, non-tribalism, independent thinking, freedom of conscience, willingness to compromise, and so on. We also drew heavily on the classical liberal tradition,

particularly to oppose de-platforming and cancel culture. Moreover, I have also argued that the Burkean conservative values that the right have abandoned could also be a strong part of our intellectual cannon. Indeed, given Burke's moderate approach to most issues, and willingness to accept reasonable change within his lifetime, I think the Burkean tradition would find a better home among moderates than among the right, who were only using it as a facade anyway. Overall, it appears that the moderate tradition can be justified by combining the best features of progressivism, classical liberalism, and (genuine Burkean) conservatism.

I believe a moderate program inspired by the aforementioned ideas is the key to maintaining a sustainable form of progress, which is rooted in objective evidence, and which can unite people rather than divide people, and gradually improve the lives of people over time. Seen this way, moderatism and radicalism can be seen as two competing forms of progressivism, with two different and incompatible programs for delivering progress. As to which one is better, I think one just needs to look at history to see the many successes of the moderate path, and the many horrible failures of the radical path.

Furthermore, if those interested in progress can be divided into ‘radicals’ and ‘moderates’, then the political landscape can be divided into three main groups: radical progressives, moderates and reactionaries. However, a good argument could be made that reactionaries, especially as they exist in this Trumpian era, are also radicals. While left-radicals want total liberation from the past, and reactionaries want total enslavement to the past, both have to destroy the status quo to get what they want. Thus it can be argued that the real divide these days is simply between radicals and moderates. And looking at history, I think there is a strong case for rejecting radicalism in all its forms, and opting for a moderate course of action going forward.

Why We Need to Rejoin Liberalism, Progressivism and Conservatism

In recent years, I have been exploring my own sympathies with the liberal, progressive and conservative philosophical traditions, and I have found that I indeed have a lot of sympathy towards all three traditions. At first glance, this might seem odd: after all, aren't these traditions supposed to be opposed to each other? This thought made me dig deeper. And then I realized that, no, these philosophical traditions are not actually opposed to each other at all. It's just tribalist politics, and the political parties and politicians encouraging such tribalism, that make it seem like so.

When we talk about a philosophical tradition, we need to start by considering what that tradition represents. The (classical) liberal tradition represents individual freedom, free speech and freedom of conscience, and it has been the tradition most geared towards the pursuit of the objective truth in Western history. The progressive tradition represents the passion to make things better for both people living in the here and now,

as well as generations into the future, using the power of rationality, creativity and compassion. The conservative tradition represents the lived wisdom of history, and the warnings against misguided radicalism it brings. Seeing it this way, the three traditions are actually complementary. The progressive impulse requires the liberal commitment to free speech and objectivity to keep it from straying into either impractical fantasy or tyranny. The progressive impulse also requires the conservative tradition to keep its excesses in check, to prevent it from being needlessly divisive, and to prevent its descent into chaos, tyranny, or both. Liberalism requires the progressive impulse to give it meaning, and hence justification for continued relevance. It also requires the conservative tradition to defend it from illiberal radicalism. Finally, conservatism is at its best when it is acting to provide checks and balances against potential progressive excesses. If the progressive impulse were to cease to exist, conservatism would have lost its original purpose, and would likely degenerate into paranoid reactionism.

Thinking about it this way, we can see the pathologies that are currently plaguing the Western political landscape, and how they have arisen in the first place: wokeness represents a form of progressivism that is without liberalism, and also resistant to the checks and

balances of conservatism. On the level of theory, postmodern critical theory makes wokeness possible, by rejecting both the values that underpin the liberal tradition, and the entirety of our traditional inheritance that underpins conservatism, by painting both as a product of oppressive power relations. Thus postmodern critical theory has bred a 'progressivism' that is in practice regressive, harmful and oppressive. However, the reason why this could have happened in the first place was because the circles in which postmodern critical theory had been able to take hold had already largely rejected liberalism, and made conservatism taboo. This largely happened in the aftermath of the radical wave of the 1960s-70s, and reflected the ideological worldview of the radical activists of that era. It was the creation of a 'progressive' intellectual scene that fundamentally rejected both liberal and conservative philosophy that made the development and rise of postmodern critical theory possible in the first place. Without such a scene, voices representing both the liberal and conservative traditions would have been able to provide a much needed checkmate to the postmodern critical theory worldview, and hence force the progressive impulse back onto its previous left-liberal path, where it was actually doing quite well.

A similar thing has actually been happening on the right too. Since the 1980s at least, the American right has been out to make 'liberal' a dirty word, with considerable success. This has made any embrace of liberalism on the right more and more taboo over the years. Eventually, some people came to the conclusion that, to be truly on the right, one had to reject liberalism in its entirety. This is why moderate members of the US Republican Party and the UK Conservative Party have been derided by those on the hard right as RINOs or even 'leftists'. Some hardline New Righters even consider President Reagan to be not truly of the right! These developments have created the space for a 'conservatism' that is hostile to liberal values, as well as any hint of the progressive impulse, to develop. However, this new form of right-wing politics, by definition, strays from what true conservatism is, because as I have noted multiple times, true conservatism doesn't oppose change per se, but only radical change that is rooted mainly in abstract ideas, and/or represent a radical rupture from long-standing traditions. What we need to remember is that conservatism arose in response to radical progressivism's excesses, and was an attempt to curb those excesses, with the most prominent historical example being Edmund Burke's critique of the French

Revolution. However, what must also be remembered is that Burke, and many other prominent conservative thinkers, actually supported reasonable attempts at reformist change during their lifetime. Moreover, in the English-speaking West, liberalism has been a strong influence on our politics in one way or another since the days of the Magna Carta at least, which means that a genuine English-speaking conservatism must necessarily be liberal to a great extent. Thus, a 'conservatism' that fundamentally rejects both liberalism and progressivism cannot be a genuine conservatism. It would be reactionism, i.e. an attempt to completely reject all change, using whatever means possible. Looking back, the social policies of the right had already descended into reactionism in the late 20th century, a time when they ran scare campaigns against video games, rap music and gay marriage to win votes. This kind of political campaign helped the right win elections, but it also cultivated a highly reactionary base, which led to the educational polarization of politics, and also sowed the seeds for Trumpist reactionary populism, as well as the illiberal (and at times anti-democratic) 'New Right' (which is basically the 'high fashion' counterpart to the 'pop culture' of Trumpism, and arguably more dangerous).

In conclusion, the progressive impulse without the guidance of liberal values and the checks and balances of conservatism led to the rise of wokeism, and 'conservatism' turned entirely against liberalism and progressivism led to the right becoming reactionary, which sowed the seeds for Trumpist reactionary populism. The misguided radical activists of the 1960s-70s created the conditions for the former, while the political strategy of the right in the 1980s-90s created the latter. Overall, it is the pitting of progressivism against liberalism/conservatism, and the pitting of conservatism against liberalism/progressivism that has allowed all this to happen. Therefore, to heal the divide, to end the polarization, and to restore sanity, we need to urgently re-unite the liberal, progressive and conservative political traditions. This really is the antidote to the toxicity of our politics.

The Non-Left, Non-Right Free Thinkers' Manifesto

(Note: This manifesto adapts some content from The Progressive Conservative Manifesto also written by myself in 2025. There is some overlap between the core concepts of the two manifestos, since progressive conservatism is a subset of 'non-left, non-right' thinking.)

1. The Necessity of Going Non-Left

In the 2010s, there was some sort of awakening to social justice concerns across the West. At first, I welcomed this awakening, because I have always been compassionate, and have always believed that society ought to be made fairer and more accommodating to disadvantaged minorities. However, as the decade went on, things became unsettling. Feminists began accusing men of 'mansplaining' and guilty of upholding the 'patriarchy' on a widespread scale. Colorblindness began to be rejected, and replaced by 'race consciousness' in some circles. The 'born this way' argument that had served LGBT rights so well for

decades was increasingly being replaced by weak and unscientific paradigms like ‘gender is a social construct’. Free speech was attacked, and ‘safe speech’ was championed instead. Later on, cancel culture would become widespread, and it would be justified on postmodernist talk about ‘power dynamics’. Still later, society would go into full postmodernist mode, where activism often became about enforcing clumsy top-down linguistic changes, reinterpreting history to cast the West and its liberal institutions as irredeemably racist at their foundations, destroying statues of controversial historical figures and so on. It became clear to me that progressivism and social justice had lost their way.

I never left the ideals of social justice and progress, but the movement clearly left me behind. After several years of trying to understand what went wrong, I concluded that postmodern critical theory was to blame. I further understood that postmodern critical theory had essentially become the operating principle of the contemporary Western left, the lens through which they see everything, and the method with which they approach every issue. Postmodern critical theory was strangling the quest for social justice from every angle, and it had become so entrenched that it had become essentially impossible to challenge that worldview

sufficiently from within the left. I concluded that, only by exiting and firmly placing oneself outside the philosophical left, could one truly begin to solve this problem.

The necessity of a philosophically non-left alternative is demonstrated by the fact that the excesses of the 2010s left had created the space for a toxic, reactionary movement to rise, which is at least partly responsible for allowing Trump to return to the White House, and it has also exhausted the optimistic passion of a substantial part of two generations (Millennials and Zoomers), who are now too burnt out to engage in any meaningful movement to improve society. This is also not the first time the far-left's model of change has brought nothing but reactionary backlash and exhaustion of the youth: the radicalism of the 1960s-70s gave way to three decades of right-wing dominance (the time during which my generation grew up in), while the radicalism of Europe in the early 20th century arguably paved the way for fascism. It is clear that the far-left's model of change has failed repeatedly, and will always fail, leaving behind the people who would be harmed by the resulting backlash, and the broken passions of a generation of youth, every time. Such a faulty program must be thoroughly challenged, so no more generations will be wasted and/or harmed in the future.

2. Why the Non-Left Must Not be Hijacked by the 'Right'

In the 2010s, an 'anti-woke' movement arose gradually to counter the excesses of the 'woke left', which was what activism rooted in postmodern critical theory had become known as. I joined the anti-woke discourse in an attempt to cure the social justice movements of their newfound postmodern critical theory influences, but later came to be frustrated and ultimately heartbroken by the reactionary New Right's hijacking of the anti-woke discourse, and indeed, the whole anti-woke brand. When Ron DeSantis is using 'anti-woke' to bully Disney, and when Donald Trump is using anti-DEI to justify his radically authoritarian executive orders, you know the right-wing has turned 'anti-woke' into an excuse for doing something horribly authoritarian. I certainly want no part of the culture war that Trump, DeSantis and their cheerleaders represent. Frankly, that movement insults my fundamental values like compassion, freedom and objectivity.

Just like other reactionary right political factions before it, the Trump-inspired New Right is trying to corral all sorts of non-left people into a 'right' unified by a reactionary cultural program, one that leads to very real

harms in the real world. They are doing so in order to gain political benefit, and they have very well-funded media, both old and new, at their disposal to achieve their goals. This is why they have succeeded to some extent. However, those of us who are aware of what is happening need to resist them in whatever way we can. There is no reason why the non-left needs to be reactionary or bigoted. One can indeed be non-left and still be humane in outlook. That we disagree with the philosophical left doesn't mean we should accept racist, anti-LGBT or otherwise hateful ideas. This is especially true for those of us who came to adopt a non-left stance from frustration with the left during our participation in social justice movements, and/or because we were inspired by philosophies like classical liberalism, libertarianism and Burkean conservatism, all of which are clearly incompatible with the radically reactionary sentiments of the populist right.

3. The 'Non-Left, Non-Right' Should be About Intellectual Freedom

What we need to remember is that the reason why we left the left in the first place was because the left didn't offer enough intellectual freedom. The contemporary philosophical left's mix of philosophical influences

collected over the past 100+ years has hardened into an ideological straitjacket, and only by leaving the left could we break free of this straitjacket. Given this, there is no reason why we should work with other forces that similarly seek to limit our intellectual freedom and independent thinking, including, but not limited to, the aforementioned New Right.

We should also acknowledge that there is no one way to be 'non-left, non-right', and there should never be a 'party line' that everyone needs to toe, like in the left or the right. The 'non-left, non-right' is inspired by philosophical traditions like classical liberalism, libertarianism, reformism, moderatism, pragmatism and Burkean conservatism, and the way each individual interprets and combines these philosophical traditions are certainly not going to be identical. This means that, as long as free thought reigns, the 'non-left, non-right' cannot become an echo chamber of conformity.

4. The 'Non-Left, Non-Right' Seeks Good Faith Debate with the Left, Not Culture War

We in the 'non-left, non-right' 'left the left' because we cannot accept the ideological straitjacket of the philosophical left. This doesn't mean we don't have

common ground with the left, or that we see the left as enemies we cannot work with. We are certainly not diametrically opposed to the left, like the way the 'own the libs' right is. Where it makes sense, we will continue to work with the left on shared goals. Moreover, even though we have left the philosophical left, there is no reason why we cannot continue to support politically 'center-left' parties. This is for two reasons: firstly, the political center-left (US Democrats, UK Labour etc.) are not the same as the philosophical left (the cannon of thought that animates activists and thinkers who identify as belonging to the left-wing tradition), and secondly, there is no reason why we can't support the same party as those in the philosophical left, if only for pragmatic reasons. Influencers from the reactionary right keep trying to confuse the two forms of 'leaving the left' in order to coerce us into joining the 'right'. Sorry, that's not happening.

I need to re-emphasize the point that we don't see the left as enemies. By rejecting the left's ideological straitjacket, we are not necessarily saying that all of the left's ideas are worthless. Rather, we are saying that we see things from a different point of view, and seek to have a good faith and robust debate over all sorts of issues. What we seek is conversation, not polarization and enmity. We ask that those in the left treat us and

our ideas in good faith, and not lump us together with the reactionary right in bad faith. (This, again, is another reason why we must not be enticed to work with the reactionary right under any circumstances, because they actually do seek polarization and enmity against the left. This really cannot be good for society.)

VII. Some Thoughts to End On

Freedom Does Not Exist in a Vacuum

I have always been a great supporter of freedom, and I have long been concerned that the West is losing its freedom. My concerns began in the aftermath of 9/11, when the Bush administration severely curtailed civil liberties in the name of stopping terrorism, violating long-standing guarantees of freedom and privacy in the process, and other governments around the Western world also followed suit. Soon after, the 2003 Iraq War was also justified as part of a wider 'war on terror', and opponents of the war were decried as unpatriotic or worse. The infamous Dixie Chicks incident proved how cancel culture was in full force back then, even though we didn't have that term yet. The next year saw a big moral panic wave over gay marriage driven by the religious right. In the 2004 US Elections, the victory of President Bush and the passage of anti-gay marriage constitutional amendments in many states were explained by the media as due to the rise of 'values voters', which further emboldened the religious right. By 2005, there were attempts to make schools teach 'intelligent design' in biology classes, and this campaign

even spread outside America. Meanwhile, while libertarian ideas also gained popularity as a reaction to these instances of authoritarian overreach, they weren't gaining ground quickly enough to push back against the much larger wave of authoritarianism. A big reason was that libertarianism itself was often not very practical. The strict application of the 'non-aggression principle' (NAP) in real life was a tall order indeed. It just couldn't compete with the simple messaging of the authoritarians, which was rooted in the primal emotion of fear.

It was in this context that I first developed the foundational idea for Moral Libertarianism: that every individual should have equal and maximum moral agency. In practice, it would mean every individual having the right to their own moral decisions, as long as it does not compromise another individual's right to the same. Every individual would be guaranteed their own free speech, freedom of conscience and freedom of expression, because these rights do not affect others' expression of the same rights. Every individual would also have freedom of action as long as it did not impinge on the same right for another individual, i.e. your right to swing your fist stops at my face. I think this is very fair, and much better than the religious right trying to shove their beliefs down people's throats, or politicians

trying to get people to vote for them by fearmongering and scapegoating minorities and promising to impose authoritarian measures targeting those minorities.

Later on, I would also apply Moral Libertarian thinking to argue against the postmodern-critical theory left, which sees society and culture as an oppressor vs. oppressed landscape defined by groups based on immutable characteristics. I was in fact surprised that the left was equally able to curtail free speech and other individual liberties at first, but that is exactly what started to happen in the mid-2010s. For some time the threat to freedom was coming much more from the left than the right, which was why my writing in that era mainly targeted the left. More recently, the illiberal right has been making a strong comeback, which means that the fight for freedom has effectively become a war on both sides for the first time in my lifetime. All throughout these developments, the Moral Libertarian idea of championing Equal Moral Agency for every individual, and associated ideas developed from this core idea, have been immensely helpful in anchoring my own thinking to a commitment to freedom, even as many others I once respected have strayed to either the authoritarian left or the authoritarian right along the way.

What I also learned in these two decades is that freedom does not exist in a vacuum. As I said before, I have observed many previously pro-freedom individuals stray towards authoritarianism, of both the left-wing and right-wing variety. Some progressives who fought for free speech on the Iraq War in 2003 and against the religious right's anti-gay marriage push in 2004 somehow managed to support de-platforming and cancel culture in the late 2010s. Some self-identified classical liberals who opposed cancel culture and the illiberal left in the 2010s somehow flipped to support the populist reactionary culture warriors in the present, rationalizing Don't Say Gay, drag bans, draconian abortion bans and potential IVF restrictions as somehow necessary to 'fight wokeness'. In each case, I was deeply disappointed, but was also driven to find out what went wrong. What I learned was that freedom does not exist in a vacuum. As those who have been following me for some time would have heard me argue over the past two years, certain things are very bad for freedom, including tribalism, echo chambers, a lack of compassion, moral panics, all-or-none thinking, and an over-commitment to abstract philosophy and theory. Freedom cannot exist in a vacuum, because it needs the opposite of these things to thrive, i.e. true diversity of opinion, an open and fair marketplace of ideas, a culture

that encourages compassion, rationality and compromise, and prioritizing the practical resolution of problems over philosophical concerns. Absent a strong commitment to these things, any talk of freedom would soon turn into its opposite.

While I have talked a lot about the necessary conditions for freedom, up until now I have not yet re-integrated them with my Moral Libertarian model. For a long time, I have identified being overly abstract and impractical as the major weakness of classical libertarianism, and in developing Moral Libertarianism, I wished to develop a more practical model of libertarianism. However, in the early years, I was still narrowly focused on how to apply the principle of Equal Moral Agency. While this would be much more practical than trying to apply the NAP, what I have realized is that it still narrowed the scope of freedom too much to be a strong enough practical safeguard for freedom. This is why, going forward, I believe Moral Libertarianism should be broadened to encompass the conditions that appear to be required for freedom to thrive. In this Moral Libertarianism 2.0, the principle of Equal Moral Agency will still be an important reference point to help us decide on moral questions and solutions, but more attention needs to be paid to the overall context too, to ensure that the conditions for freedom are truly met, and maintained in

a ongoing sense. This would be well justified, because if the conditions for freedom aren't there, abstract talk about the principle of Equal Moral Agency would be effectively useless too.

Why Classical Liberals Should Never Give Up on Progressive Politics

Last month (May 2024), Donald Trump made headlines by attending, and being booed, at the Libertarian Party's convention. This, in turn, has given plenty of media attention to the civil war that has been occurring inside the Libertarian Party in the past few years, which is the context for both Trump's attendance and unwelcome reception. As I first talked about two years ago, the right-wing Mises Caucus took over the party leadership back in 2022, and they also removed many liberal-leaning planks from the party platform, including support for abortion rights. Moreover, some of those associated with the Mises Caucus appear to have racist sympathies, authoritarian-right sympathies, or both. This has led to backlash among genuine libertarians, with a drop in membership and donations, and the revolt of some state parties, as a result. Which ultimately means that the Libertarian Party is in a very weak, confused and divided state right now.

Looking at the reasons for the Libertarian Party's split, the biggest reason is that it is a small party supported by a small movement, and thus vulnerable to takeover by larger groups. However, the bigger context of the rise of authoritarian populism in the right shouldn't be ignored either. Libertarian writer Robert Tracinski recently wrote that, 'when the wider culture of “the right” goes crazy for authoritarian nationalism, it spills over into this much smaller movement and carries it along with the flood'. I agree that this, unfortunately, is an important part of what is happening here. Tracinski goes on to note that some of his own readers, who are probably getting 'a firehose of conservative media coming at them all day long', respond to him with all of the usual right-wing talking points, and as only one person he has a limited ability to counteract that. He then goes on to observe that the Libertarian movement seems to have done better from the Reagan era to the Tea Party era, 'when a small-government outlook had a stronger foothold on the right'. In other words, the Libertarian movement seems to be blowing in the winds of the wider culture of the political right, and can't stay anchored to its own values when the prevailing winds blow the opposite way. That libertarianism, a very small political movement, is situated in a much larger right-wing milieu, with its endless flood of money-driven and

conformist propaganda, makes this essentially inevitable.

From the aforementioned analysis by Tracinski, we can see that there are two main root causes that have allowed the populist-right to attempt a takeover of libertarianism: that it is a small movement, and that it is situated in the right-wing milieu. The first problem can only be solved by making the movement more practical, and thus more popular. This is why I think it would be best for libertarianism to remain a philosophical position, and for us to rally around a more moderate classical liberal politics in practical reality. The difference in the way I use the terms 'libertarian' and 'classical liberal' is that I see 'libertarian' as an ideal, an ideal that is very necessary as an inspiration and a moral reference point for us, but also an ideal that is not practical to implement in reality, at least in the immediate present. The problem with libertarian immediatism is that it is not practical, nor does it practically lead to more freedom for most people, and this condemns it to perpetually being a small movement blowing in the winds of the political right. This is why I prefer a politics of libertarian-inspired reformism instead. I define reformism as a politics of aiming to gradually make things better, informed by both the Enlightenment belief in the ability of rationality to improve things, and the

Burkean conservative belief that change should be based on practical circumstances rather than abstract ideas, and should be rooted in a given society's traditions as much as possible. My aim is to reconcile libertarian ideals with a reformist politics, so that we gradually and practically reform society towards a more liberal state over time. This, I think, is most consistent with the original ideals of classical liberalism. Having said all this, I still believe that the maintenance of the libertarian ideal, if only as a philosophical ideal, is very important, if liberty is to survive the onslaught of illiberalism coming from all directions at the moment. Thus, the populist right's attempt to take over the libertarian movement has been of great concern to me for some time now. Something needs to be done to counteract this, urgently.

The second problem, that the libertarian movement is helplessly pushed around by bigger forces on the political right, can only be resolved by removing libertarianism from the right-wing milieu altogether. The problem here is essentially that a commitment to freedom and the coalition of forces on the political right are simply not compatible. Historically, libertarian immediatists have aligned with the right to achieve specific goals, specifically to cut the size of government. In particular, beltway libertarians have aligned with

neoconservatives while downplaying the authoritarianism of their hawkish foreign policies, while paleolibertarians have done the opposite by aligning with paleoconservatives to advance an isolationist foreign policy, while shamelessly pandering to the paleocons' racism and bigotry. Both of these strategies have caused the libertarian movement to become enmeshed in the right-wing milieu. And let's face it: the right is objectively not a good place for liberty, because there are powerful illiberal elements in the right-wing coalition. These elements are much more numerous and powerful than the libertarians, which is why, in the right, it is almost always the authoritarians who call the shots and the libertarians who get pushed around.

Historically, the right has been far more comfortable with things like the arbitrary use of government power, and the discrimination of citizens on religious grounds. In the 2000s, the Bush-43 administration, and like-minded governments around the Western world, placed radical limits on civil liberties in the name of stopping terrorism. Supporters of Bush's 2003 Iraq War called those who opposed the war unpatriotic. Later on, the religious right sought to ban gay marriage almost everywhere, followed by a campaign to force schools to teach creationism in biology classes. After a brief libertarian wave in the 2010s, a more authoritarian right

has reasserted itself in recent years. Some people in the NatCon movement explicitly condemn classical liberalism, blaming it for the rise of wokeness. The overturning of Roe v. Wade, whatever one might think of that from a constitutional law perspective, has led to right-wing politicians reflexively banning abortion without even the pretense of community consultation or compromise in many states, which is clearly authoritarian no matter how you look at the issue. Politicians like Ron DeSantis have been on a crusade to remove LGBT rights and implement book bans and drag bans, as well as to use state power to punish 'woke corporations' that oppose their agenda. The official Republican platform in Texas and some other states still clearly state an intent to work to overturn gay marriage in America, and the Texas platform even calls for unconstitutional religious instruction in public schools, as well as defining abortion as homicide, which would carry the death penalty in that state.

And let's face it: all the extremely illiberal policies discussed above are made possible by their popular support in the Republican base, reinforced by the propaganda of the 24/7 right-wing news media that Tracinski described as a 'firehose' 'coming at them all day long'. For example, in a 2023 survey, a whopping 40% of Republicans were uncomfortable with finding

out that their friend was gay, and the figure rises to 59% for trans (compared to only 14% and 19% for Democrats respectively). Remember, we're not talking about disagreement with certain LGBT activists' agenda. We're talking about having a gay or trans friend here, and roughly half of all Republicans had a problem with that in 2023! The intense anti-LGBT propaganda in right-wing news media appears to have had a powerful effect here. Again, it's just not something a small and powerless libertarian movement could address effectively by any means.

Finally, and this is my main response to the anti-war focused paleolibertarian crowd, the Republican Party is still the more hawkish party overall, and Trump has not really changed this fact. The fact that most neocon hawks continue to support Trump rather than quit the party after Trump's takeover is testament to this. After all, you have to remember that Trump only opposed regime change wars on vague 'America First' grounds. Therefore, those paleolibertarians who think Trump is the answer to their prayers have essentially been taken for a ride. With 'America First' being nothing more than a vague slogan, it could be used to mean anything, including, yes, War on Terror type policies, which were actually justified by Bush as necessary to keep America safe! Even the Iraq War could have been sold as

'America First' if they wanted to! In fact, let's not forget they used to call those who opposed that war unpatriotic. In the wrong hands, America First could easily be the slogan used to resurrect Bush-Cheney style regime change wars policy, and even stifle dissent.

All this is why I have never believed in classical liberals or libertarians aligning ourselves with the right, and the brief common ground of woke skepticism and anti-cancel culture activism during the 2010s didn't quite sway me either. Instead, I have long been trying to return classical liberalism to a dominant position on the progressive side of politics, where classical liberalism actually originated. As I've long suspected, the right was always a bad fit for libertarians, although it arguably only came to a head very suddenly in 2022, when the Mises Caucus took over the Libertarian leadership, Roe v. Wade was overturned, the War on Disney began, Don't Say Gay became law, and any hope for an IDW revival vanished with Jordan Peterson's hard-right turn, all happening at almost the same time. Although it might not have been apparent earlier on, the seeds for these developments were always there, and much more powerful than most libertarians would have admitted too. On the other hand, wokeness has been clearly on the decline since 2021. Joe Biden's landslide victory in the 2020 Democratic primaries showed that the far-left

was a much smaller and less powerful force than previously thought, and since that event the old center-left establishment has become gradually bolder in staring down the cultural far-left. It started with the Harper's free speech letter during the BLM movement, and this reset has hit the entertainment industry, college campuses and newsrooms alike. It's why everything from Netflix to New York Times feels much less 'woke' than four years ago. This profound shift has also meant that many moderate progressives now have the space they need to reassess the far-left's ideas and politics.

With the far-left clearly on the defensive, and the center-left increasingly questioning their politics, there is a very real opportunity for classical liberals to reclaim lost ground with moderate, reasonable progressives. When they find both the far-left and the old Democratic establishment unsatisfactory, they have a decent chance of embracing classical liberalism. Perhaps, one day, there might even be something like a classical liberal caucus in the Democratic Party and other center-left parties around the Western world, as well as in progressive institutions, newsrooms and think tanks, as a strong bulwark to the very vocal but actually small far-left, as I first envisioned back in 2017, when I called for a new movement to 'Make Liberalism Great Again' in

response to the rise of MAGA. While we were aggressively drowned out by the far-left back then, the tide has now turned against them, and we might have our best chance yet.

Also published by TaraElla...

The Moral Libertarian Perspective

The Moral Libertarian Horizon book series (published from 2018) examines the moral libertarian ideal in depth, and examines its application over a range of topics such as free speech, freedom of conscience, the free market of ideas, the question of private property, and social justice. Moral libertarian cases against social engineering, victim mentality, identity politics and political correctness are also presented.

In writing these books, my mission is to give liberal ideals as much life force as possible. Such life force can only come with idealism, moral conviction and clear principles. We believe that the one core liberal* idea is the Equality of Moral Agency (EMA), i.e. each and every individual should have equal ability to live and act out their sincerely held vision of morality, and no outside force, should be able to diminish any part of this."

In particular, all my political and social commentary assumes the context of a Western liberal democratic system. In such a system, if voters receive biased information due to interference with free speech, they could get their decision totally wrong. If they elect a culturally authoritarian government that, for example, treats people differently based on identity or opinion, this would have severe moral consequences. It is this situation that Moral Libertarianism was specifically developed to guard against.

The Moral Libertarian Perspective book incorporates the best content from The Moral Libertarian Horizon Volumes 1, 2, 4 and 5, and is intended to provide a more complete picture on the Moral Libertarian philosophy.

Also published by TaraElla...

The Libertarian Reformist Path

The Libertarian Reformist Path is the sixth and latest book from the series. This book is a collection of articles written in 2023-24, reflecting on the position of libertarianism in the contemporary Western political landscape, the positives of a moderate (or 'centrist') reformist path forward as an alternative to the increasingly extreme left-tribe and right-tribe, and, since both libertarianism and moderate reformism are clearly beneficial for healing our deeply divided and polarized politics, how we can reconcile libertarianism and reformism. The result is a proposal for a 'libertarian reformist' politics, that takes in the best parts of both traditions.